PlayStation 3 · PlayStation Portable · PlayStation Network · PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

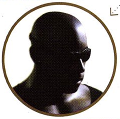
APRIL 09

PlayStation – The Official Magazine Issue 18 (April 2009)

150 NEW GAMES

You'll never turn off your PS3 again!

VIN DIESEL: HARDCORE GAMER
His vision for Chronicles of Riddick: Dark Athena *revealed*



SINGULARITY
FPS powerhouse Raven Software alters time!

+ BEST **FREE** **STUFF** ON PSN!

All-new Metal Gear? pg 6

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

KILLZONE® 2

MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

KILLZONE.COM

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WAR. PERFECTED.

"5 out of 5 stars. Editor's Choice."
— PlayStation: The Official Magazine

"A guaranteed stunner for the PS3. 5 out of 5 stars."
— GamePro Magazine

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PS3™

PlayStation Network

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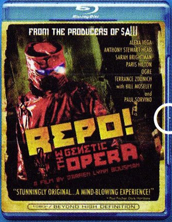

FROM THE PRODUCERS OF SAW
ALEXA VEGA
ANTHONY STEWART HEAD
SARAH BRIGHTMAN
PARIS HILTON
OGRE
TERRANCE ZDUNICH
with BILL MOSELEY
and PAUL SORVINO
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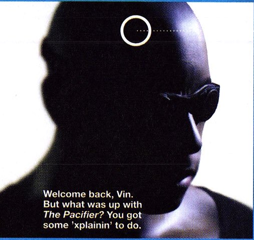
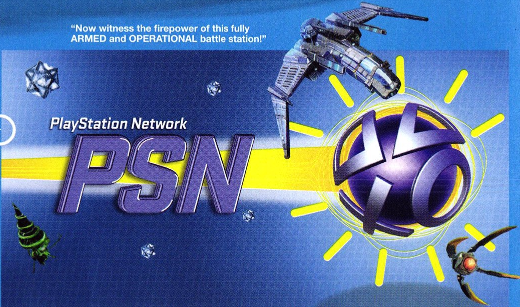


Welcome back, Vin. But what was up with *The Pacifier?* You got some 'xplainin' to do.

"The Looove Boat...soon will be making another run..."

"Now witness the firepower of this fully ARMED and OPERATIONAL battle station!"



PlayStation Network
PSN

"I know, I still can't believe Carrie married Big after he ran out on her. Anyway, have a good fight!"

After stealing a horse and brandishing a sword, Bob was permanently banned from the Ren Fair.

"Soooo... Whattya doin' after you're done eviscerating demons?"

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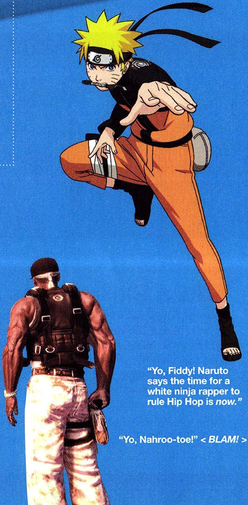


"Yo, Fiddy! Naruto says the time for a white ninja rapper to rule Hip Hop is *now.*"

"Yo, Nahroo-toe!" < *BLAM!* >

Editor's Note

"Did you not promise me that I would have a fair hearing?"

One casual conversation is all it took. "What do we have to be excited about?" Someone threw out. Everyone cast a glance around the room at each other. We'd all switched on our PS3s in the last few days, played games, watched Blu-ray movies, and downloaded demos, Qore, and a Friday night movie from the PlayStation Store. Around the room staffers 'fessed up to streaming video of an obscure TV show from the main PC to the living room TV. Others had downloaded a PSN game that caused two staffers to snicker and the one excited downloader to gush about its qualities. We talked about sending messages.

And then one of us commented that they'd played a game. Not because it had to be reviewed or because it needed coverage in the magazine, but for fun. One by one we all commented on having played a game of choice. But somehow that sense, feeling, impact was lost when we were explicitly tasked with answering a question about our PS3 usage.

So I asked what everyone thought about the current state of the PS3. Easy as it is to find fault or cast unfavorable comparisons, it was clear that we were all playing, and all looking forward to the next round, appreciating what was coming in 2009. Some time ago we'd dismissed the suggestion that 2008 was the "Year of the PS3" as the over-reaching hyperbole it clearly was. But when we started to discuss the games of 2009, the sheer volume of options resulted in a conversation lasting longer than we expected. Turns out, we have a lot (and for purposes of this round-up a very neat 150 games) to look forward to just in the next 12 months.

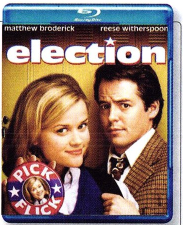
> "Some time ago we'd dismissed the suggestion that 2008 was the "Year of the PS3" as the over-reaching hyperbole it clearly was."

In the course of this discussion we picked out developers that we knew would contribute significantly to the ongoing distinction of the PS3, and that story will be part two of our reveal of the State of the PlayStation 3 Union. Naturally, it followed that the PSP, which we hope retains viability in the year ahead, should be part of the equation, alongside the PlayStation Network, and the personalities and corporate direction-shifters that will impact the most macro-level decisions about our games. So we hope you enjoy part one of our investigation on the State of the PS3 Union. And let me know what you think are the most important factors, features, and functions that Sony needs to address in the year(s) ahead.

Rob

Win a Blu-ray movie!

Here we go again with the quote contest, and your chance to win a random Blu-ray movie. Identify the movie where you'll hear the quote at the top of this page and send it, along with your full name and shipping address, to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com** with the Subject line of Ed Note April. Casey Fullenwider of Lewisport, KY followed the instructions perfectly in recognizing last month's entry from *Finding Nemo.* Congratulations to Casey, Carlos the Intern will remind me to send your prize very shortly!



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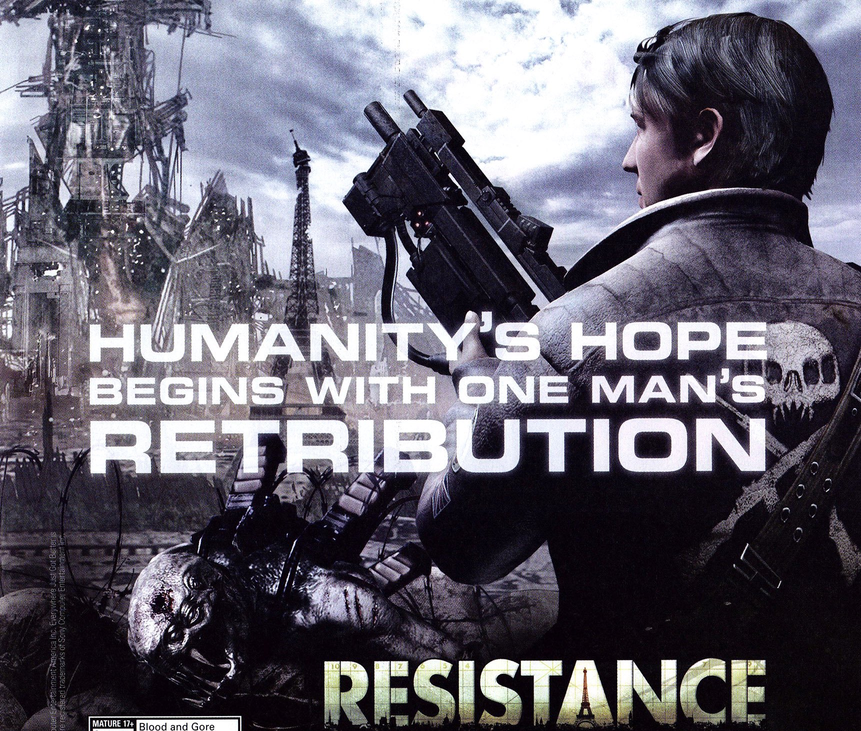
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Partial Nudity
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence
SONY

The Chimera have taken Europe. And for Lt. James Grayson, the battle just got personal. The fight for mankind continues in the newest Resistance chapter, and it's only on the PSP® system. This action-shooter features unique 8-player multiplayer and an advanced third-person targeting system. Connect your PSP to your PS3™ with Resistance 2™ and unlock additional features to help give humanity a shred of hope. The Resistance is now everywhere.

EVERYWHERE JUST GOT BETTER™

PSP PlayStation®Portable

PlayStation®Network

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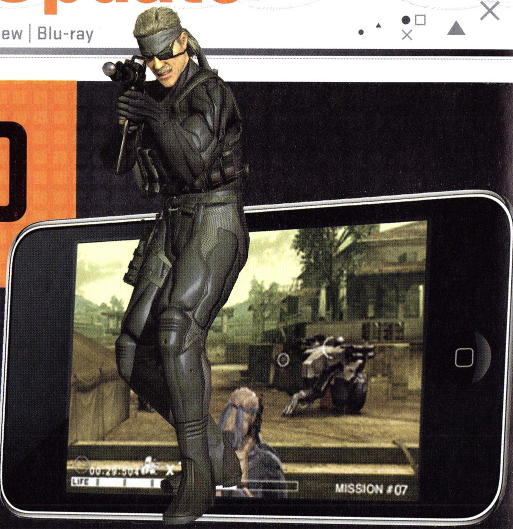


1 GET MGS ON iPHONE

Konami delivers the killer app

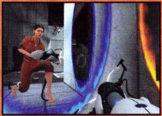
In the unlikely event that anyone ever asks you, "Is that a snake in your pocket?" You'll now be able to legitimately answer, "Yes, and it's Solid." Because despite Hideo Kojima's insistence that *Metal Gear Solid 4* could only be done on PS3 because it needs the huge capacity offered by Blu-ray, the alchemists at Konami have somehow cooked up a version for iPhone and iPod Touch. It's called *MGS Touch*, it's due out in the spring, and features eight levels with more to be added later.

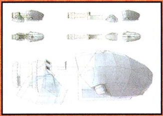
Disappointingly (tee-hee) for excitable owners of other consoles, *MGS Touch* is the new game that was teased on the Kojima Productions website at the end of 2008, rather than the oft-rumored port of *Guns of the Patriots*.

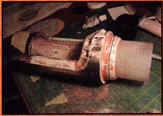
Double tap

Movement and shooting are performed via touchscreen taps, while making a pinching motion between thumb and finger zooms the game's targeting reticule. Finished levels will earn you bonuses—*MGS*-themed wallpaper is good, but we'd prefer a CODEC-style ringtone.

Konami also plans to bring *Silent Hill* to the iPhone and Touch, with a new game played from the first-person perspective, which features all the faceless death nurses you've come to know—and possibly feel an awkward attraction to. Completing the Apple love-in is a *Frogger* game, but as we excommunicated him in 2005 after the *Frogger: Helmet Chaos* scandal, this is where our story must end.







2

A TRIUMPH

A recreation so perfect even GLaDOS would approve!

Weighing in at 15 pounds, stretching to a full 22 inches long, and illuminating in both blue and orange, Harrison Krix's recreation of the Portal Gun is quite possibly the most authentic fan-made prop we've ever seen. You've ogled the pictures; now find out exactly what went into creating this masterpiece of gaming fandom!

PTOM: WHAT'S IT MADE OUT OF?

HK: Wonderflex, Apoxie Sculpt, ABS plastic, PVC pipe, Acrylic... some of the more interesting ones: The center tube is an acrylic plunger handle, the rubber tubes terminate into TV Coaxial connectors, and the decals were made using printable water-slide decal paper that can be fed through an inkjet. It has 27 LEDs and over 40 feet of wire in it, and I used nearly 15 cans of spray paint during its construction. I also stole a printer-roll spindle out of the waste bin at work to make that weird bladed-thing in the barrel.

DID YOU CUSTOM MAKE EVERY PIECE YOURSELF?

Very much so. The only things I can think of that came "off the shelf" were the plunger handle bar and the tube it sits in. Even still, I had to paint the handle with matte clearcoat in order for it to look how I wanted. Everything else, from the claws to the casings to rings around the barrels, required hours of sanding, shaping, and smoothing in order to look just right. The circuit board for the lighting was custom as well, nothing terribly fancy, but still several hours with a soldering gun and a multimeter.

WHAT POWERS THE LIGHTS?

The Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device is powered by a miniaturized fission reactor that is able to bend the fabric of space-time by generating and controlling a linked Dirac sea. My version uses a 9-volt Energizer Battery I found in my toolbox.

HOW LONG DID THIS TAKE YOU?

A rough estimate would put this at 150 hours, but I wouldn't be surprised if it was more. I'm not going to say all of that was productive time, either; plenty of my efforts went into fixing previous screw-ups in technique, poor planning, or just bad luck. Some of these materials I was working with for the first time, so there was definitely a teething process.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO DO THIS (AND WHY THE PORTAL GUN SPECIFICALLY)?

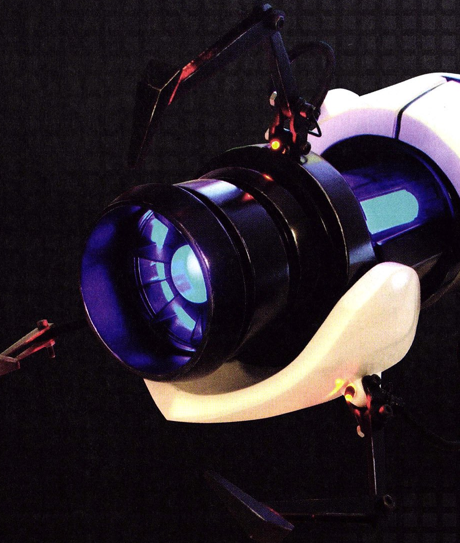
My girlfriend and I had gone to Dragon*Con in August of 2008. We went as Link and Midna and were quite well received. Ever since I'd played *Portal*, I knew I wanted to make the Portal Gun, so after going to a con and knowing that we wanted to go again, I had a perfect reason.

DO YOU MAKE THINGS LIKE THIS FOR A LIVING OR IS IT JUST AN AWESOME HOBBY?

This is only really the third or fourth prop I've made, though I've been into custom fabrication (for cars) for a while now. Still just a hobby at this point, but I am actively accepting commissions. After the Portal Gun blew up on the Internet, I'm now booked until September!

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE BIT?

That little bloodsplatter on the back of the gun took about 10 tries to get perfect, and every time I had to clean off that side of the gun and completely redo the weathering on the casing, since cleaning off the red paint took the black with it. When we finally got it right, I actually recoiled as the paint hit the gun, saying "UGH!" out loud. It looked almost too realistic when the red spatter first hit the white sides. I guess that's how you know you've really got it right.



If you've got a prop you'd like Harrison to fabricate for you, go ahead and email him at volpinprops@gmail.com.

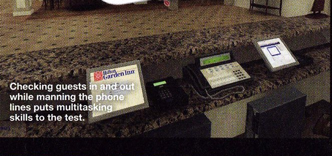
ROOM SERVICE 3

At Hilton Garden Inns, service comes with a smile and a PSP

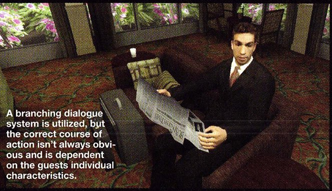
All work and no play may make Jack a dull boy, but if you're a Hilton Garden Inn employee, playing a PSP game on the job is actually encouraged—thanks to an interactive training program called *Ultimate Team Play.* Developed by Virtual Heroes, Inc., *UTP* allows staffers to assume the role of a front desk associate, food and beverage employee, housekeeper, or maintenance worker, and interact with customers of varying personalities and temperaments in a three-dimensional recreation of a typical Garden Inn property. Success is gauged by how quickly, politely, and correctly the team player addresses the needs of virtual guests, with scores based on Hilton's real-life SALT (Satisfaction and Loyalty Tracking) system. We're guessing that it might take a sequel to add weapons DLC and ad-hoc play.

8:08 AM
YOUR HOTEL SALT
CLEAN ROOM
SONY
POWER
HOLD
SELECT
START
HOME
PSP

The French maid has nothing to do with *Ultimate Team Play.* This is just what happens when PTOM concocts "customer service" scenarios.



Checking guests in and out while manning the phone lines puts multitasking skills to the test.



A branching dialogue system is utilized, but the correct course of action isn't always obvious and is dependent on the guests individual characteristics.

PLAYING ON THE JOB

Hilton Garden Inn's Senior Manager for Brand Education David Kervella and Jerry Heneghan, CEO of developer Virtual Heroes, spoke to PTOM about their unusual project.

PTOM: How did the idea for *Ultimate Team Play* come about and how long has the game been in development?
DK: The idea came about when our HGI Brand manager saw his daughter playing a computer game and thought it was a great way to teach and reach our team members. It took about a year to develop the concept as I contacted 20 different companies that could potentially create it. The development of the game took another year after we signed the contract with Virtual Heroes.

Has Virtual Heroes developed games of this nature before?
JH: *America's Army* is probably our most well-known game, but we've done many others including *Virtual Peace: Turning Swords to Ploughshares* for the Virtual Peace Project and *Pamoja Mtaani,* an HIV awareness project for Warner Bros. Interactive and PEPFAR [President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief].

Are there any distinct challenges in developing a game for a corporate client as opposed to the consumer market?
JH: Both have to be fun! However, we do follow a rigorous process during which we identify a client's objectives and link them to measurable performance outcomes based on the players' performance.

Why was the PSP chosen as the platform for the game?
DK: The computers at each hotel aren't designed for gaming so I had to look at other platforms. The PSP is a perfect fit since it's a cool device, fun to play with, and known by many of our team members.

What's the initial reaction been from employees?
DK: The reaction so far is great. Team members love this kind of training and have been waiting to get it ever since we announced we are working on it. We've even had people that don't work at hotels inquire about buying this game.

Is *Ultimate Team Play* merely a test for Hilton Garden Inn or are games the training tool of the future?
DK: Games have so much potential as a training tool. I personally believe that they will become a part of the training curricula for many companies in the future. The other Hilton family brands were in mind when we started working with VH and we asked them to build a game that we'd be able to adapt to other brands as well.

Does Virtual Heroes have any other PS3 or PSP games in development? Can you reveal any details?
JH: We've been selected as part of a team to build the official NASA game and are currently evaluating platforms for the game.

> “Now I get that the sports genre is the Rodney Dangerfield of games when the awards are handed out. But c'mon, one of the best sports games of recent times not even in the Top 50 ?”
>
> —*Peter Moore, President, EA Sports*
>
> *(On FIFA 09's omission from Eurogamer's Top 50 of 2008.)*

FIFA 09

MADDEN 09

MLB 08

SORRY, SPORT

4

While roaming the blogosphere over the holidays, I happened across this Peter Moore diatribe at **http://itsinthegame.ea.com/archive/2008/12/31/wtf-where-the-hell-is-fifa-09.aspx.** In it, he bemoans the slighting of sports games in general and *FIFA 09* in particular come year-end awards time.

Now, my initial reaction was (with no offense to Mr. Moore who ranks amongst the sharpest, most admirable, and straightest shooting suits in the industry): “Oh god, not another suit complaining about how his precious game is misunderstood and under-appreciated!” But after that involuntary thought spasm and the careful recollection and introspection of my own awards voting, I've come to the conclusion: The man's definitely got a point.

Judged purely on stats, even the most critically acclaimed non-sports videogames are hard pressed to match the year-on-year sales numbers of the major sports games. And I'd warrant that sports games offer far more memories, smiles, and laughs per gaming session than most Game of the Year award winners. Talk to any veteran gamer and you'll find a solid core of greatest moment memories stem directly from endless trash-talking showdowns with friends. And replay value? No contest.

2008 was, without question, a banner year for sports games. *Madden NFL 09's* technical enhancements made me sit up and notice and *care* for the first time in years. *FIFA 09's* 10-on-10 online play is a revelation. *NHL 09's* six-on-six online play and guide arrows actually enhanced my understanding of the sport's position-by-position responsibilities. Brilliant. And just to prove this isn't an EA suck-up session: SCEA's *MLB 08: The Show* and 2K Sports' *NBA 2K9* have been consistent office favorites.

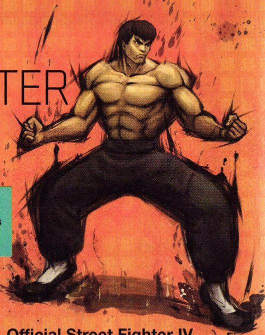
But when it came time for PTOM's Game of the Year award, not one sports game even registered a blip as I mused over the likes of *Metal Gear Solid 4, Grand Theft Auto IV, BioShock,* and *LittleBigPlanet*. The easy rationalization is: that's why we have a Best Sports Game of the Year award. Or is it simply that we take for granted what we love most? Don't think it's some elitist attitude of the enthusiast press, it's a general malaise shared by the gaming public: if PTOM ever ran a sports game on our cover, it'd be our worst selling issue of the year—guaranteed.

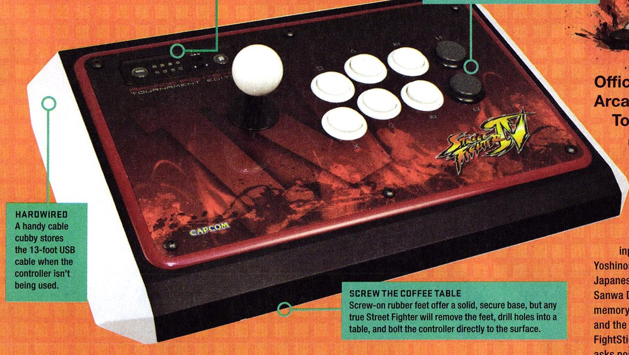
But when you break down the Xs and Os, sports games don't garner Game of the Year honors because they're a multi-year phenomenon that showcase constant refinement over mind-blowing revolution. Even in 2008, how much credit can a videogame really be given for translating an existing real-world sport experience that already has an inherent amount of greatness built in? Invent *real* baseball, create the videogame, and then maybe we can talk Game of the Year…or the Millennium.

Face it Mr. Moore, The last time a sports game really made a splash was when EA's paradigm-changing *John Madden Football* debuted on the Sega Genesis. And the next time will probably be when *Madden NFL 3010* hits the Holo-deck of the starship *Enterprise.* In the interim, your EA Sports awards shelf may remain a bit spartan, but be satisfied that you're earning a spot in gamer heaven for services rendered as another sizeable profit check thuds into EA's coffer. Roger Burchill

5 MAD FOR STREET FIGHTER

What's a beatdown victory worth to ya?





COMMAND AND CONQUER
The easily programmable Command Module allows dual-speed Turbo assignment to any or all of the action buttons. Use it as a handicapping system for players of differing skill levels or simply to cheat!

STICK IT TO ME, BABY
Wrap your hands around the same ball-handled joystick and 30mm action buttons found on the official Japanese-market Vewlix *Street Fighter IV* arcade machine.

HARDWIRED
A handy cable cubby stores the 13-foot USB cable when the controller isn't being used.

SCREW THE COFFEE TABLE
Screw-on rubber feet offer a solid, secure base, but any true Street Fighter will remove the feet, drill holes into a table, and bolt the controller directly to the surface.

Official Street Fighter IV Arcade FightStick: Tournament Edition

MANUFACTURER: MAD CATZ | MSRP: $149.99

Cue the spotlight and the choir—for *Street Fighter* fans seeking true arcade performance and feel, the Arcade FightStick: Tournament Edition is the Holy Grail of controllers. Featuring design input from legendary Capcom producer Yoshinori Ono and components sourced from Japanese arcade machine manufacturer Sanwa Denshi, no arcade stick in our collective memory offers the qualitative fit and finish, and the satisfying performance and feel of the FightStick: TE. Yeah, it's really expensive, but it asks point blank: how hardcore are you?

ARCADE FIGHTSTICK
Street Fighter IV
CAPCOM

Official Street Fighter IV Arcade FightStick

MANUFACTURER: MAD CATZ | MSRP: $69.99

If your bank account isn't quite baller status, the standard Arcade FightStick makes a fine and more attractively priced alternative. It has a smaller joystick and action buttons, but it's still a quality controller and the laptop size might even make it preferable for some. The Command Module is identical to the TE's, but the cable cubby doesn't survive the downsizing. A nice touch is the supplied "Character Card" that displays selected special moves that can be inserted into the top panel of the controller for easy reference.

TURBO
SELECT
START
Street Fighter IV

Official Street Fighter IV FightPad

MANUFACTURER: MAD CATZ | MSRP: $39.99

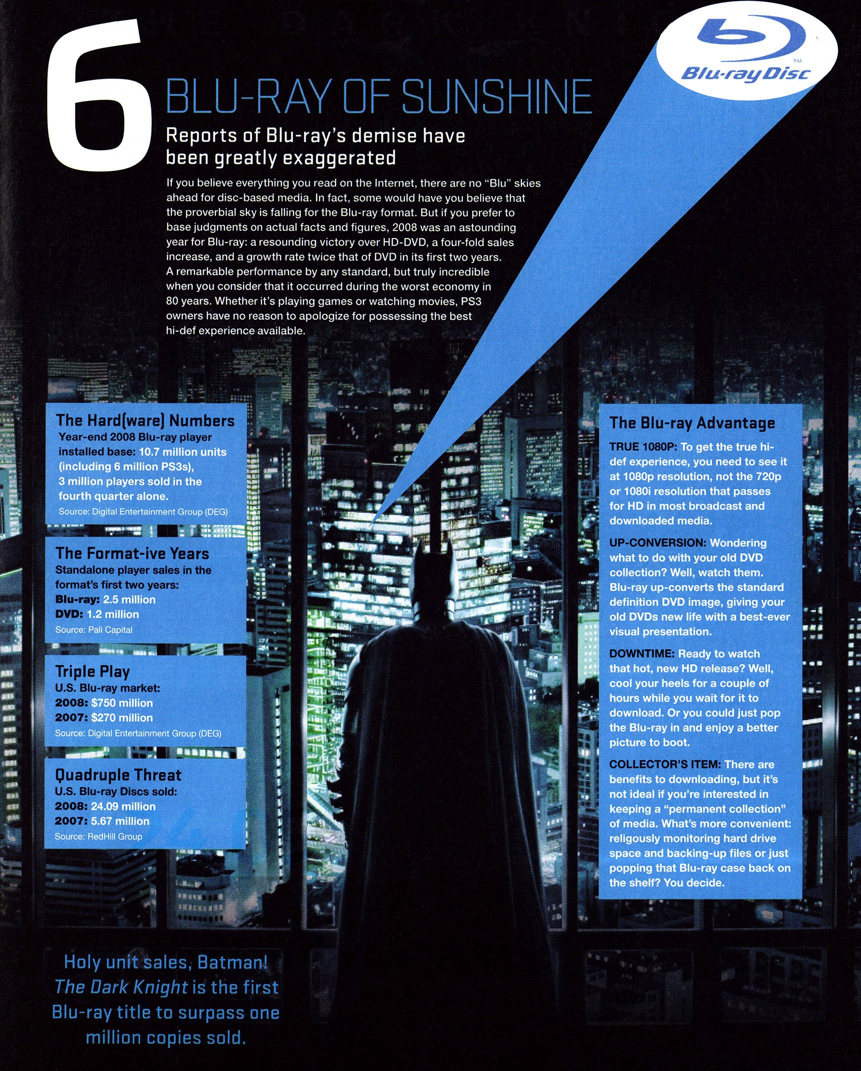
Let's face it, fighting games are a genre better suited to D-pad control. The wireless FightPad integrates some welcome old school features including an enlarged circular 8-way floating D-pad that makes for smooth and consistent move executions. The R1 and R2 buttons move to the face of the controller to complete the classic six-button layout, while L1 and L2 comprise the two shoulder buttons. The FightPad is available with Ryu, Ken, Chun-Li, Blanka, or Akuma art.

6

BLU-RAY OF SUNSHINE

Reports of Blu-ray's demise have been greatly exaggerated

If you believe everything you read on the Internet, there are no "Blu" skies ahead for disc-based media. In fact, some would have you believe that the proverbial sky is falling for the Blu-ray format. But if you prefer to base judgments on actual facts and figures, 2008 was an astounding year for Blu-ray: a resounding victory over HD-DVD, a four-fold sales increase, and a growth rate twice that of DVD in its first two years. A remarkable performance by any standard, but truly incredible when you consider that it occurred during the worst economy in 80 years. Whether it's playing games or watching movies, PS3 owners have no reason to apologize for possessing the best hi-def experience available.



The Hard(ware) Numbers

Year-end 2008 Blu-ray player installed base: 10.7 million units (including 6 million PS3s), 3 million players sold in the fourth quarter alone.

Source: Digital Entertainment Group (DEG)

The Format-ive Years

Standalone player sales in the format's first two years:

Blu-ray: 2.5 million
DVD: 1.2 million

Source: Pali Capital

Triple Play

U.S. Blu-ray market:

2008: $750 million
2007: $270 million

Source: Digital Entertainment Group (DEG)

Quadruple Threat

U.S. Blu-ray Discs sold:

2008: 24.09 million
2007: 5.67 million

Source: RedHill Group

The Blu-ray Advantage

TRUE 1080P: To get the true hi-def experience, you need to see it at 1080p resolution, not the 720p or 1080i resolution that passes for HD in most broadcast and downloaded media.

UP-CONVERSION: Wondering what to do with your old DVD collection? Well, watch them. Blu-ray up-converts the standard definition DVD image, giving your old DVDs new life with a best-ever visual presentation.

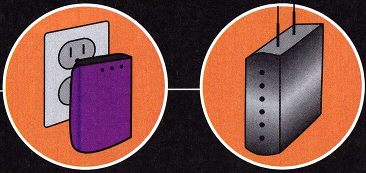
DOWNTIME: Ready to watch that hot, new HD release? Well, cool your heels for a couple of hours while you wait for it to download. Or you could just pop the Blu-ray in and enjoy a better picture to boot.

COLLECTOR'S ITEM: There are benefits to downloading, but it's not ideal if you're interested in keeping a "permanent collection" of media. What's more convenient: religously monitoring hard drive space and backing-up files or just popping that Blu-ray case back on the shelf? You decide.

Holy unit sales, Batman! *The Dark Knight* is the first Blu-ray title to surpass one million copies sold.

HARDWARE 7

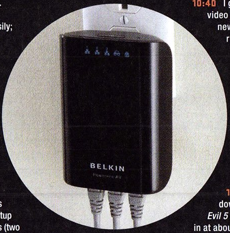
We sample the latest in wired connectivity and wireless communication



Powerline AV+ Starter Kit

MANUFACTUER: Belkin | MSRP: $179.99

"Stream movies and game online through your home's electrical outlets"!? No folks, it's not crazy black magic; it's the sensational claim printed on the packaging material of the Belkin Powerline AV+ Starter Kit! Simply plug the two network adapters into any two electrical sockets, then connect one adapter to a router and the other to your PS3 (using Ethernet cables, of course), and your house's circuitry will instantly become the information super highway's latest onramp, rendering inconsistent wireless connections and unsightly cables all but obsolete. At least, in theory. But does it really work as advertised? Intrepid editor Scott Butterworth investigates...



10:18 Plastic came off easily; we're off to a good start!

10:19 Oooh shiny...but somewhat bulky. I'm a little concerned I'm going to be sacrificing an entire outlet to these bad boys.

10:21 Why does this thing come with a disc? It says...User Manual? I'm going to ignore this for now and hope I never have to bother with it. Instructions are for suckers! Plus, this setup has exactly four components (two adapters, two Ethernet cables), and I'm already familiar with plugging things into walls, so...

10:22 Paper instructions are three steps long.

10:23 Say, there's an index that lets you know what all the LEDs on the tops of the adapters mean. Hooray, no "why the hell is that flashing?" mysteries!

10:25 The adapters come with two—count 'em, two—sets of electric plugs, one of which adds a chord, I guess so you don't have this massive black creature attached directly to and completely covering your outlets. Neat.

10:29 Commence plugging.

10:30 Plugging successful! No fires or electrocutions. Now to consult my LED cheat sheet to figure out what's going on.

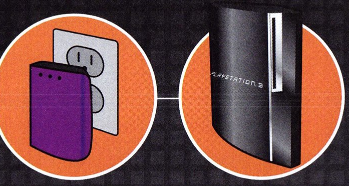
10:34 Commencing Phase 2, in which I fire up my PS3 and see if it's actually connected to the Internet.

10:35 Success! And judging by how quickly it logged me into PSN, I'm guessing the connection is pretty decent. Now for some downloads!

10:40 I got distracted by random video content, but the good news is, streaming video runs like a dream! After a barely noticeable load time, I got about three minutes of smooth, uninterrupted video. No connection problems, no buffering, no dropout, no quality issues. Impressive! Ok, *now* I'll go download stuff.

11:09 Alright, so I downloaded the *Resident Evil 5* demo—which weighs in at about 472MB—twice. While connected through the Belkin adapters, the download took 12 minutes and 49 seconds. While connected directly to the router, the download took 13 minutes and 11 seconds...which means the Belkin download was actually faster! Definitely not what I was expecting.

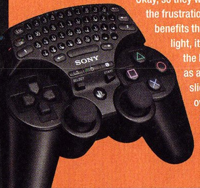
11:12 Closing thoughts: These adapters surprised me. The setup was incredibly simple (never did have to use that disc), and the quality of the connection was absolutely outstanding. Color me, impressed, Belkin. This is definitely a welcome (albeit pricey) alternative to running 30 feet of Ethernet cable through your house.

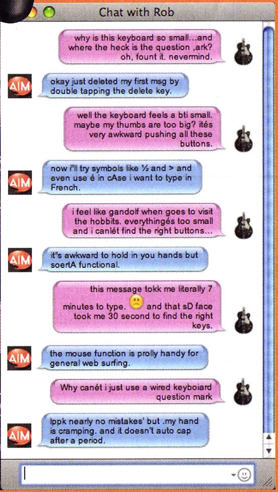


SCEA PS3 Wireless Keypad

MANUFACTURER: Sony CE | MSRP: $49.99

Through some back and forth exchanges, Rob and Teresa analyzed the charms and frustrations of the Wireless Keypad. Okay, so they were a bit fixated on the frustrations, but here are the benefits they don't mention: it's light, it's pretty (enough), the keypad can be used as a touch pad (just slide your fingers over the buttons), and with (much) practice, we're sure it becomes more intuitive.





why is this keyboard so small...and where the heck is the question ,ark? oh, fount it. nevermind.

okay just deleted my first msg by double tapping the delete key.

well the keyboard feels a bti small. maybe my thumbs are too big? ités very awkward pushing all these buttons.

now i'll try symbols like ½ and > and even use é in cAse i want to type in French.

i feel like gandolf when goes to visit the hobbits. everythingés too small and i canlét find the right buttons...

it's awkward to hold in you hands but soertA functional.

this message tokk me literally 7 minutes to type. ☹ and that sD face took me 30 second to find the right keys.

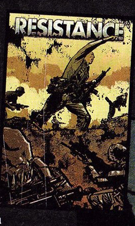
the mouse function is prolly handy for general web surfing.

Why canét i just use a wired keyboiard question mark

lppk nearly no mistakes' but .my hand is cramping. and it doesn't auto cap after a period.

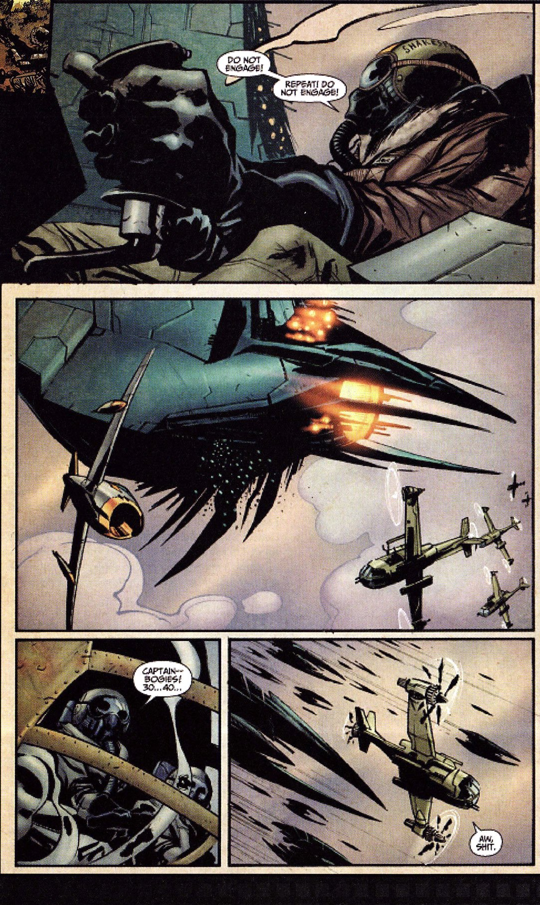
The above conversation actually took place via the PSN's Message Box functionality, but as Rob and Teresa were unable to capture screens, they painstakingly recreated the conversation, letter by misspelled letter, on AOL Instant Messenger. Just for you. Now their brains hurt.

8



GRAPHIC RESISTANCE

Nathan Hale explores a bold new frontier: paper


DO NOT ENGAGE!
REPEAT! DO NOT ENGAGE!
CAPTAIN— BOGIES! 30...40...
AW, SHIT.

With everything from '50s era Americana to ultra-sinister alien invaders, the alternate-history of the *Resistance* franchise is fascinating, rich, and—despite the two stellar games—largely unexplored. Fortunately, the world of Nathan Hale is no longer confined to videogames, as the story has now spilled on to the pages of a brand new comic book mini-series.

Penned by Mike Costa—the man behind *Secret History of the Authority: Hawksmoor*—with art by Ramón Pérez and CP Smith, the six book series will be "integral to the game story and will help further define this complex universe," according to publisher Wildstorm. And at 32 pages and $3.99 each, these comics should certainly provide an affordable way to expand your understanding of the *Resistance* lore.

The series officially kicked off in January (although those of you who picked up the *Resistance 2* Collector's Edition back in November have already received an exclusive glimpse of issue #0), so the first three issues should currently be available at your local (or Internet) comic shop. If you're under 18, however, you'd better start aging fast because the books, like the game, are pretty graphic.

We recently flipped through the first issue which—without giving too much away—serves as a very cursory introduction to a dysfunctional group of soldiers apparently infected by their previous encounters with the Chimera, but picked for this exact reason to be a part of Team Alpha (a possible precursor to Nathan Hale's Echo Squad) and the Sentinel Program. Among its members: Sergeant Capelli, who plays a pivotal role in *Resistance 2*.

It's unclear at the is point how Hale will factor into the story, but seeing as Team Alpha's first mission takes them to Anchorage, Alaska in early 1951, we'd guess it won't be long before he turns up…

Reflections

Resistance isn't the only videogame to receive the comic book treatment recently. Wildstorm is currently mid-way through a six-issue mini-series based on EA's wildly creative parkour platformer *Mirror's Edge*.

Rhianna Pratchett, the mind behind the story in the actual game, also penned this series. Follow underground courier Faith as she navigates the treacherous rooftops of a sterilized future, and learn everything you'll need to know to fully appreciate the game's universe.

9 THE HDMI CABLE CHALLENGE

Do you get what you pay for when buying high-end expensive cables?

HDMI CABLE | AVAILABLE FROM MONOPRICE.COM

PS3 HDMI CABLE | AVAILABLE FROM NYKO

$150
M SERIES
HD1000 | AVAILABLE FROM MONSTER

We've always figured that one HDMI lead is as good as any other. The signal's digital, we reasoned, so it either works or it doesn't. On that basis a cheap cable does just as good a job of sending images from your PS3 to your HDTV as high-end alternatives that give you no change from a Benjamin, right?

Not so, according to Digital Performance Level (DPL), an independent industry body that tests HDMI cables. DPL president, Jeffrey Boccaccio, explains that information can be lost in a digital signal just like in an analog one, and he's packing some science. Apparently, the binary bits can be "smeared and degraded" as the signal passes through the wire. "It is not measured the same way as in the old days of analog," Boccaccio continues. "It incorporates a system measurement known as 'bit transition analysis' or 'eye patterns'." This gauges the cleanliness of the signal's data transitions—how quickly it registers changes from one to zero—and is so called because the waveform result resembles a human eye.

"The [aim] is to produce a robust and symmetric eye around the eye mask [the centre of the eye], keeping any signal data as far away from the eye mask as possible," Boccaccio explains. "Touching the mask, called 'kissing the dirt', is where bit errors can begin to occur and cause the sporadic 'sparkles' on the screen."

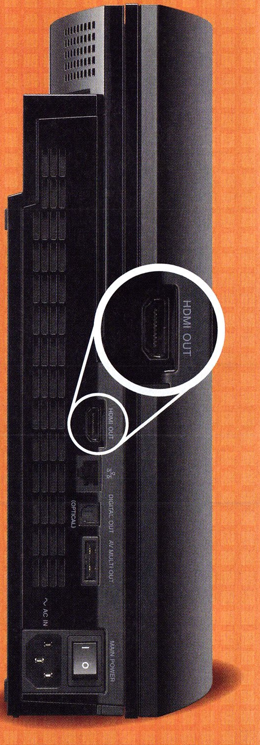
Several elements can cause this kind of data loss: lengthy cables, high temperatures, mismatched lengths in the internal wire pairings, or a bad connection in the 'clock channel', which synchronizes HDMI's red, green, and blue signals before they're displayed. And with better insulation, materials, and connectors—and, of course, a higher production cost—expensive cables do perform betterin DPL's tests.

All of which is pretty much beyond debate. But what we wanted to know was whether the difference was perceptible to actual human eyes or just super expensive testing equipment capable of detecting tiny fluctuations in data integrity.

THE PTOM TEST

Looking for expert guidance, we asked sister mag *Maximum PC's* Editor-in-Chief, Will Smith, for his thoughts on HDMI cable options. Are they worth the cash? "For short runs, like most people use, there's absolutely no difference between a $7 Monoprice.com cable and a $150 Monster cable," says Smith, "when you get to longer distances, there can be signal degradation and interference."

Not surprisingly, Monster Cable has a different story to tell, publishing articles written by staffers in specialist audio/videophile magazines, and extensive documents detailing the value of faster throughput down the digital HDMI cable. Bottom line, though, is whether we can tell the difference. And that has to go down as a "No." We've heard reports of cheaper cables having the potential for more glitches, but that's usually been in setups where the cables are often unplugged and plugged in again. Safe bet? Go middle of the road; not too cheap that the build quality might be low, and not too expensive that you can't afford *Killzone 2!*



WHAT IS HDMI?

HDMI stands for High Definition Multimedia Interface, a cable format introduced in 2003, and capable of supporting standard, enhanced, and HD signals. HDMI carries red, green, and blue visual information independently and synchronizes them before display. The HDMI standard has evolved since its original inception: if you're buying a cable to use with your PS3, ensure it's at least HDMI 1.3 compatible.

10 FINAL FANTAS-TIC DIVERSIONS

Sometimes, it feels like *Final Fantasy XIII* is taking forever to release. It's hard to wait! So, what productive activities can you do in the meantime? We have three ideas.

1 Take a crash course in Japanese, so you can play the Japanese version of the game.

2 Write *Final Fantasy* fan fiction. (Go to FanFiction.net and pick your favorite *Final Fantasy* game to see what others have written.)

3 Haunt the official *FFXIII* websites each and every day, so your eyes can soak in the latest screenshots and trailers, like the ones we have here. Don't forget to visit the North American site at **http://na.square-enix.com/ff13,** the European site at **www.finalfantasy13game.com,** and our personal favorite, the Japanese site at **www.square-enix.co.jp/fabula/ff13.**

ETCETERA

All the *other* stuff that delights the PTOM staff and distracts us from getting our work done on time. But we're not complaining.

Emerald Nuts | Food | $3.69

Back on our desks, back in the Top 10…er, Et Cetera. Hands up everyone who swore to some kind of dietary improvement as 2009 rolled in? Healthier eating is a standard entry on most resolution lists, and with that in mind you can now enjoy Emerald's Cocoa Roast Almonds in handy 100-calorie packs. It's just enough nuts for a sensible snack, but that hasn't stopped us from consuming a few bags in between meals... Damn, cocoa roasted almonds are delicious!

Battlestar Galactica | TV | Free (with Sci-Fi Channel)

BSG made our Top 10 last year in anticipation of its final season. Of course, they pulled that half-season crap so the final 13 episodes are just airing now. Well, plot twists abound in the first of the final episodes and the series' amazing storyline doesn't seem to be petering out, so all is forgiven! The saddest part is that we only have a few more chances to ogle Tricia Helfer.

LocoRoco 2 soundtrack | Music | $19.99 (for the game)

It's just too gosh-darned cute. An explosion of cute. Sometimes, the cute will do a stealth attack on Teresa while she's driving, and she has no choice but to belt out one of *LocoRoco 2's* saccharine melodies. And you know how the LocoRoco sing along to the instruments, doo-dah-ing along with their high-pitched little voices? Teresa admits she imitates them, but when we asked her to demonstrate, she just glared and told us not to mock the LocoRoco.

No Sweat Apparel | Clothes | Cheaper than you'd think

Not being a fan of sweatshop labor or unapologetically aggressive marketing, Scott was very pleased to find No Sweat Apparel, a Free Trade company that operates primarily through the Internet and a web of independent retailers. They offer everything from knitted hats to tennis shoes, all manufactured by unionized labor in an environmentally conscious manner. Sure, buying a pair of No Sweat sneakers won't save the world, but it's a welcome alternative to paying Nike for some Converse-in-name-only Chuck Taylors.

Monkeybone | DVD | $9.98

Carlos the Intern had us scratching our heads with his selection of this surreal Brandon Frasier movie from 2001. And then he mumbled something about "a very cute Rose McGowan...," which Roger could totally relate with (although Roger favors her turn as Sasha the Nitro Girl, in 2000's *Ready to Rumble)*. But really, Carlos…Miss Kitty? *Rawwwrrrr.*

TOKYO SKA PARADISE ORCHESTRA

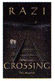
Tokyo Ska Paradise Orchestra | Music | Got Yen?

You know a music genre's a bit marginalized when MS Word's spellchecker doesn't even recognize its name, but according to Scott, ska music is alive and well in…Japan. Tokyo Ska Paradise Orchestra has spent the past two decades mixing traditional ska stylings with a modern pop sensibility to create some of the catchiest tunes this side of the Beatles. Their music can be difficult to locate in the U.S., but check out their videos on YouTube.

FutureDerm.com

Futurederm.com | Website | Free

"Wear sunscreen—*everyday."* Ever since she stumbled upon Futurederm.com, which reviews and highlights different skincare products, Teresa's been yapping non-stop about the importance of niacinamide ("it's like a miracle ingredient"), ritinol ("not for everyone"), and vitamins C and E ("great antioxidants!"). But we just don't care. "It's important to treat your skin well!" Teresa insists. It's okay, Teresa, you try and hold on to your youth as long as you can.



Razi Crossing | Book | $16.95

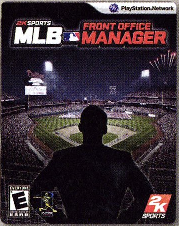
Since we finally managed to go an issue without Rob's incessant book-whoring *[Rogue Leaders: The Story of LucasArts*, available at bookstores everywhere], Roger thought he'd pimp his brother's book about his other brother's misadventures in Iran during the Islamic revolution. It's an incredible tale with an improbable outcome and a pointed life lesson about what not to do when you're young and stupid. Available from Amazon.com.

Samsung 46" 1080p LCD HDTV | Gear | $2,099.99

When Carlos the Intern isn't dreaming about Rose McGowan, he's lusting after this big-screen HDTV. His folks aren't buying the line that it'd be a work-related purchase and that the PS3 just doesn't shine on a standard-def TV. Of course, based on what we pay Carlos, he'll be able to pick one up for himself in about… Never.

OtterBox iPhone 3G Defender Case | Accessory | $49.95

Roger's quest for the Holy Grail of iPhone cases may be at an end. Although, Roger loved his SwitchEasy Color case, he realized he has two uber-destructive children and an insanely chew-happy puppy. The solution? The incredibly robust OtterBox case, which comes with a handy holster to boot. Sure it makes the phone a bit bulkier, but the peace of mind is worth it.



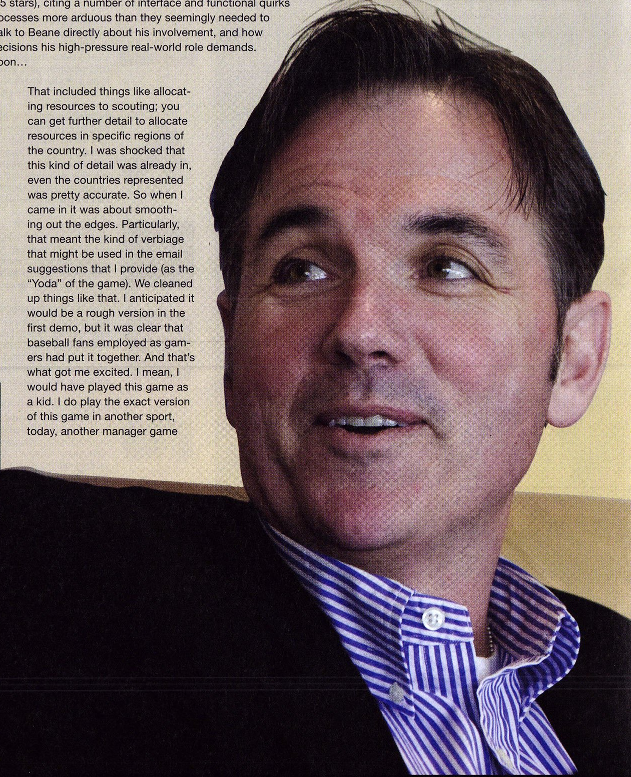
OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION INTERVIEW

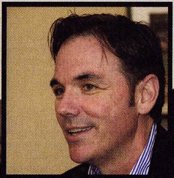
BILLY BEANE

2K **Sports needed expert insider direction** to fine-tune its first baseball management sim, *MLB Front Office Manager.* According to Oakland Athletics GM, Billy Beane, it was down to him and Boston Red Sox *wunderkind,* Theo Epstein. In this instance, the A's beat the Red Sox, and Beane signed on to provide background and detail to the development team as it tests the waters with a fairly hardcore stats-based simulation on the PS3. We reviewed the game last issue (giving it 3 out of 5 stars), citing a number of interface and functional quirks that made many of the game's processes more arduous than they seemingly needed to be. Still, we did get a chance to talk to Beane directly about his involvement, and how the game replicates the kind of decisions his high-pressure real-world role demands. And baseball season is starting soon…

PTOM: When you started work with the developers were there elements you consider fundamental to your job as a Major League Baseball GM that the game would absolutely have to incorporate?

BB: My anticipation of what I'd see in the first demo was that there would be a lot of construction to be done. But I was shocked at the amount of work in that initial demo…they'd already spent a lot of time and done the heavy lifting. First and foremost they're baseball fans, as well as gaming fans, so when I got in there, we could get into the details. That included things like allocating resources to scouting; you can get further detail to allocate resources in specific regions of the country. I was shocked that this kind of detail was already in, even the countries represented was pretty accurate. So when I came in it was about smoothing out the edges. Particularly, that meant the kind of verbiage that might be used in the email suggestions that I provide (as the "Yoda" of the game). We cleaned up things like that. I anticipated it would be a rough version in the first demo, but it was clear that baseball fans employed as gamers had put it together. And that's what got me excited. I mean, I would have played this game as a kid. I do play the exact version of this game in another sport, today, another manager game





Billy Beane 411

JOB TITLE: General Manager, Oakland Athletics
AGE: 46
TOTAL MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL GAMES PLAYED: 148
MOST WITH TEAM: Minnesota Twins (80 games, 1986)
CAREER BATTING AVERAGE: .219
BECAME A'S GM: 1997 (age 35)
BIGGEST TEAM SUCCESS: ALCS winners, 2006
OTHER INTERESTS: Soccer

> "Success doesn't have to be defined by wins, but by utilizing what you have at your disposal."

that I have, and I was worried I might be humbled by this game. I've everything to lose if I don't perform in the sim!

Are there pieces of the job—say, scouting or player assessment—that are proprietary to your organization? And did you have to generalize that input?
My presence was outlining the role the GM would play. Because you're taking past situations and projecting the future, the metrics for performance are built-in to the AI and stats. So it's a question of what were some of the things that need to be part of the game. For example, making trades, making it tough, where you offer something and say, "They have to take that trade," and it's rejected; believe me, that happens. I'm overpaying for that guy? And you still don't want to do it," but that *actually* happens.

And the psychology is exactly that of a GM: you want a player, you decide to offer them something that you think is fair; then they don't take it, then you get frustrated but you realize that you want him, so you get obsessed with getting him; then at some point you either overpay for him or the guy continues to turn you down, and you privately go nuts because you don't understand why!

Is it a paralysis from fear?
That can happen, yeah. What's interesting about having a trade work is the idea that you turn it into a zero sum negotiation in the game, not where I win, you lose. Part of the art is saying, "I really want this player." How do I create a package that this game or GM is going to accept based on his own needs. You can't look at trades as wanting a really good player and not wanting to give up something that helps the other guy.

I had that problem with the Giants in my *Front Office Manager* season—I just couldn't get a third baseman.
That happened in real life for years, too! Like the Mets, right, until David Wright... We'll spend 30 years trying to get a third baseman.

And I was offering deals like Noah Lowery, Eugenio Velez, and a top AAA prospect pitcher for Edwin Encarnación.
And you still couldn't do it, right!

I was hovering over the "Send" command because if they took it, I wouldn't be sure that I did the right thing in the first place.
That's how it happens in a real trade, too! I'm getting him, but I might have overpaid, I'm not sure I should have done that. That's what happens. There are some trades no matter how you overload them they're not going to take it, and you're wondering how that can be, and who can talk some sense into that guy?

The game year starts right after the World Series. Is that the most important time of the baseball GM's year?
Sure, the busiest time is from the end of the World Series up through Christmas, and then January is somewhat steady, not quite the same intensity. Spring Training is surprisingly the time during the season that it's the most relaxed. And then the season comes and you're managing that roster.

Do you wish you could sim past a bunch of games during a season just to see what happens, like you can in the game?
Yeah, I'd do that in the regular season, I'd like to swing past some games like the Yankees and the Red Sox!

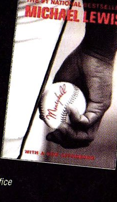
So I'm three years into my GM career, and about to get fired. I went 51-111 in my first season.
Oh, you probably should be fired. <laughs>

But what are the other "wins" you look for as a GM, if you don't get into the playoffs, or to the World Series, what do you take out as the positives?
Success doesn't have to be defined by wins, but by utilizing what you have at your disposal. Success for the Yankees is going to be different than success for an Oakland or a Kansas City because there are high expectations. If you're a small-market team and you get 85 wins based on the amount of money you spend then you might get a little bit more money the next year. But if you win 85 games with the Yankees you might be on thinner ice than if you lost 90 games elsewhere.

Do you get down to details, like players that you spotted progressing through the system, as a source of an individual win?
Decisions you make can impact other decisions later down the line. So one of the choices you have is player development—once you've proved yourself there, you've gained by being successful in small parts, though it might not necessarily translate into wins. But like the real game, it's how you deal with what you have. That's a lot of the expectations. As the Yankees, winning 85 games just isn't going to cut it.

What about the intangible of personality, of locker room gelling?
You'll have situations through the ebb and flow of a season, where maybe you're losing and morale will be low, and the fan base isn't so excited. Those things combine over events that happen in the season, and you hope that they're temporary, but you ask the question of what you should do, whether you should change it up. If it continues, you have the ability to change it, to make a difference.

Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game

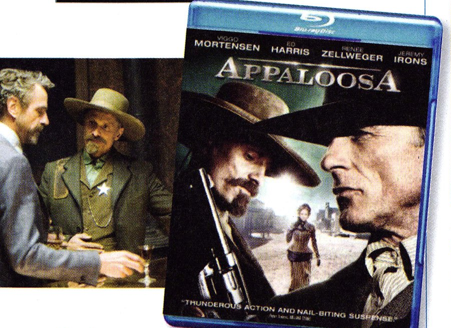


It's true that the Oakland Athletics are a "small-market" team, meaning their attendance reach and potential revenue is paltry in comparison to many other MLB franchises, and downright derisory when placed side-by-side with powerhouse American League organizations like the Yankees, Red Sox, and even Angels. So their relative success under Beane's stewardship, and his use of "sabermetrics"—a scientific method of evaluating player attributes and potential—was always going to be a fascinating story. Author Michael Lewis followed Beane's strategy around the 2002 amateur draft, in which the A's had seven first-round picks. The dissection of this new method of thinking, of scientifically applying statistics to players to make future predictions became (and remains) essential reading for anyone fascinated by the backroom shenanigans of a GM's office. Though the methods have had their critics, it's a baseball fans' must-read, and if a copy currently sits on your bookshelf, then 2K Sports' *MLB Front Office Manager* is aimed squarely at you.

Blu-ray Central

Singing, dancing, shooting, and smashing. Oh my!

PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH


Blu-ray Disc
VIGGO MORTENSEN
ED HARRIS
RENEE ZELLWEGER
JEREMY IRONS
APPALOOSA
"THUNDEROUS ACTION AND NAIL-BITING SUSPENSE"

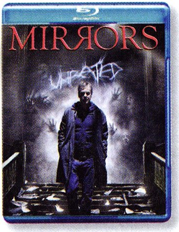
Appaloosa

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: R

| MOVIE | Westerns just keep getting better. *Appaloosa* is a surprisingly different take on the Old West, with terrific, sly dialogue, complex characters who are more than simple stereotypes, and a plot that transcends the usual template for a western. It's a superb movie on all levels, and highly recommended.

| EXTRAS | Ed Harris is an intense guy, and his commentary is thoughtful and serious stuff worth considering for fans of the movie. There are four featurettes as well, and deleted scenes, but overall it's a pretty light selection.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★


Blu-ray Disc
MIRRORS
UNRATED

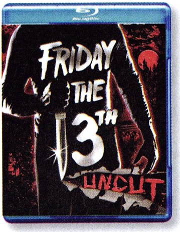
Mirrors

PRICE: $39.99 RATED: R/UNRATED

| MOVIE | There is a now-infamous scene in *Mirrors* that is notable for both the extreme level of gore and the fact that upon further reflection, it makes no sense. In fact, the movie seems to have no idea what its own "rules" are. Still, *Mirrors* is worth watching thanks to the wonderfully creepy *Silent Hill*-like visual style. For all its flaws, the movie is still better than most of the J-Horror remakes we've seen lately.

| EXTRAS | Fox packed the disc with an impressive array of documentaries, including excellent director and co-writer commentary and storyboard comparisons. The unrated version adds even more gore as well, if you're into that sort of thing.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½


Blu-ray Disc
FRIDAY THE 13TH
UNCUT

Friday the 13th: Uncut

PRICE: $29.99 RATED: R

| MOVIE | A remarkably spare slasher flick by today's standards—no torture devices, little T&A, and not a silicone-enhanced chest to be seen—*Friday the 13th* is a B-movie that managed to stab its way into the cinematic collective thanks to its ever increasingly horrible and more absurd sequels (which had remarkably little to do with the non-supernatural first). The original film however is actually a decent, if dated, little horror flick, and looks surprisingly good on Blu-ray.

| EXTRAS | It's an unrated version, which in this case means more gore, but for the most part, the same movie it's always been. The director's commentary feels appropriately nostalgic. Fans (especially those old enough to have seen it at the theater back in 1980) will love the retro-themed featurettes.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

Blu-ray Disc
2-DISC SPECIAL EDITION
"CRUDE, LEWD, RUDE AND VERY VERY VERY VERY FUNNY"
DANE COOK
KATE HUDSON
JASON BIGGS
AND ALEC BALDWIN
MY BEST FRIEND'S GIRL
INCLUDES BOTH THE UNRATED AND THEATRICAL VERSIONS
INCLUDES DIGITAL COPY

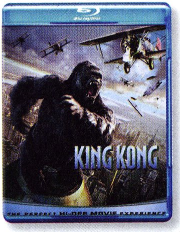
My Best Friend's Girl

PRICE: $39.99 RATED: R/UNRATED

| MOVIE | It's unclear who thinks Dane Cook is funny as a stand-up comic, but in the right role, he's a decent actor—a sort of spotty version of Ryan Reynolds. In *My Best Friend's Girl,* he plays, unsurprisingly, a complete jerk who treats women like crap so that they'll get back together with their ex. The premise works for a while, before the movie soon devolves into predictability. The biggest complaint isn't any overall plot lameness, but the criminal underuse of Alec Baldwin as Cook's sexist playa father. Overall, the movie is lewd enough to make it worth a rental.

| EXTRAS | The director's commentary is a wash, but the second track with Jason Biggs, along with the writer and producers, is a fun listen. Other than that, there's a laundry list of short featurettes and deleted scenes.

MOVIE ★★
EXTRAS ★★½


Blu-ray Disc
KING KONG
THE PERFECT HI-DEF MOVIE EXPERIENCE

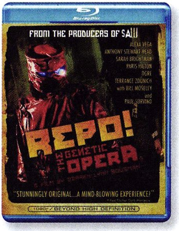
King Kong: Director's Cut

PRICE: $29.98 RATED: PG-13

| MOVIE | It's hard to imagine that anyone thought Peter Jackson's *King Kong* needed to be longer, but thankfully all the added scenes take place on Skull Island. Pacing issues aside, *King Kong* is an amazing cinematic achievement and still unrivaled for sheer testosterone-laden action. On Blu-ray, the movie reaches new heights, with a pristine image and incredible audio, making it worthy of any movie lover's collection.

| EXTRAS | Picture-in-Picture documentary footage, art galleries, BD-Live support, and Universal U-Control functionality give the extended version plenty of depth. Peter Jackson and co-writer/producer Philippa Boyens provide a great example of nuts and bolts commentary that is actually interesting and insightful.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½


Blu-ray Disc
FROM THE PRODUCERS OF SAW
ALEXA VEGA
ANTHONY STEWART HEAD
SARAH BRIGHTMAN
PARIS HILTON
OGRE
TERRANCE ZDUNICH
with BILL MOSELEY
and
PAUL SORVINO
REPO! THE GENETIC OPERA
"STUNNINGLY ORIGINAL...A MIND-BLOWING EXPERIENCE!"
1080p / BEYOND HIGH DEFINITION

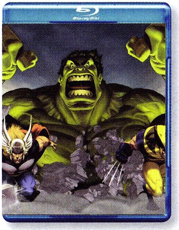
Repo: The Genetic Opera

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | If ever a movie had "cult" written on it, it's *Repo: The Genetic Opera,* and cult-type people will love every bizarre minute of it. Non-cultists, however, will still find much to like here, thanks to the style and music of this slasher/sci-fi/musical. The story isn't particularly coherent, and the focus is clearly on style over substance, but *Repo* is certain to find its niche as a current-gen replacement for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show.* You sorta have to see it to believe it, so stick it in the rental queue.

| EXTRAS | Sing-a-longs, creator commentary, deleted scenes, webisodes, and even Paris Hilton commentary on select scenes are enough to make all those cult-lovin' moviegoers happy with their purchase.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★½


Blu-ray Disc

Hulk Vs.

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | A double feature of comic smashing, a better title would have been "Hulk Kicks the Crap Out of...". In these 45-minute shorts, true believers can watch surprisingly decent animated renditions of Hulk smashing Thor in Asgard, as a pawn for Loki, and more importantly, Hulk pummeling Wolverine and the entire Weapon X facility. The second short is easily the most appealing, thanks to a heaping amount of Wolverine-powered bloodshed and the inclusion of Deadpool. And as any true Marvel fan knows, Deadpool makes everything better.

| EXTRAS | The two animated shorts still rack up a decent helping of extras. Both episodes have two different commentary tracks and several making-of shorts specific to the characters. In addition, there are sneak peeks at the next round of Marvel animated flicks.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

PlayStation: The Official Magazine
WORST OF THE MONTH

Max Payne

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** PG-13/UNRATED

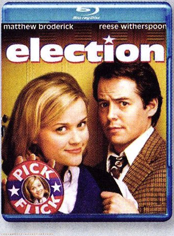
| MOVIE | There weren't high hopes for the long-delayed *Max Payne* movie, but even those were squashed by the reality of this travesty. It shouldn't be this hard to make a decent noir-revenge picture, yet *Max Payne* seems like a mentally deficit 12-year-old's attempt at copying Frank Miller's *Sin City.* The movie does nothing right. The dialogue is appalling, the plot inane, and the characters are one-dimensional stereotypes of stereotypes from other bad movies. What's worse is that the movie is actually boring, with a shocking lack of action.

| EXTRAS | Ever wonder what a clueless director sounds like? Just listen to this commentary! There's also a hefty documentary, PiP support, and a terrible, unnecessary graphic novel add-on about Max's dead wife.

MOVIE ★
EXTRAS ★★½

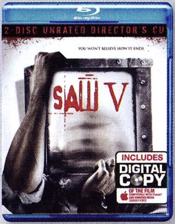
Jason D'Aprile just discovered that his PS3 also plays games. Who knew? Comments, questions, rants, raves, recommendations? E-mail him at **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

SHORT TAKES Also Released This Month


Blu-ray Disc
matthew broderick
reese witherspoon
election
PICK FLICK

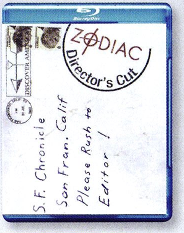
Election

+ Phenomenal proof that teenage girls are evil!


Blu-ray Disc
2-DISC UNRATED DIRECTOR'S CU
YOU WON'T BELIEVE HOW IT ENDS
SAW V
INCLUDES DIGITAL COPY OF THE FILM

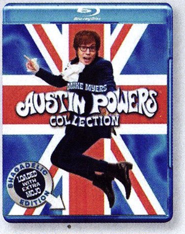
Saw V

− Just stop already. Really.


Blu-ray Disc
ZODIAC
Director's Cut
DISCOVER AMERICA
S.F. Chronicle
San Fran. Calif
Please Rush to
Editor!

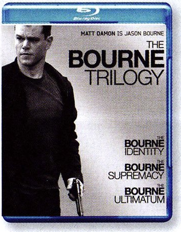
Zodiac: Director's Cut

+ David Fincher's take on real life is stirring, original, long, and beautifully filmed.


Blu-ray Disc
MIKE MYERS
AUSTIN POWERS
COLLECTION
SHAGADELIC EDITION
LOADED WITH EXTRA MOJO

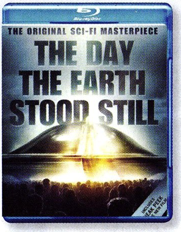
Austin Powers Collection

+ Yeah, baby, yeah! Blu-ray makes the colors shine like never before, but the third movie still sucks.


Blu-ray Disc
MATT DAMON IS JASON BOURNE
THE BOURNE TRILOGY
THE BOURNE IDENTITY
THE BOURNE SUPREMACY
THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM

The Bourne Trilogy

+ Great American spy thrillers or motion-sickness inducing trilogy? Both!


Blu-ray Disc
THE ORIGINAL SCI-FI MASTERPIECE
THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

The Day the Earth Stood Still

+ Ignore the Keanu Reeves' remake; one of the greatest sci-fi movies ever.

LOOK UP.
SAY GOODBYE.
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence
PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE
PLAYSTATION 3
XBOX 360.
XBOX
LIVE

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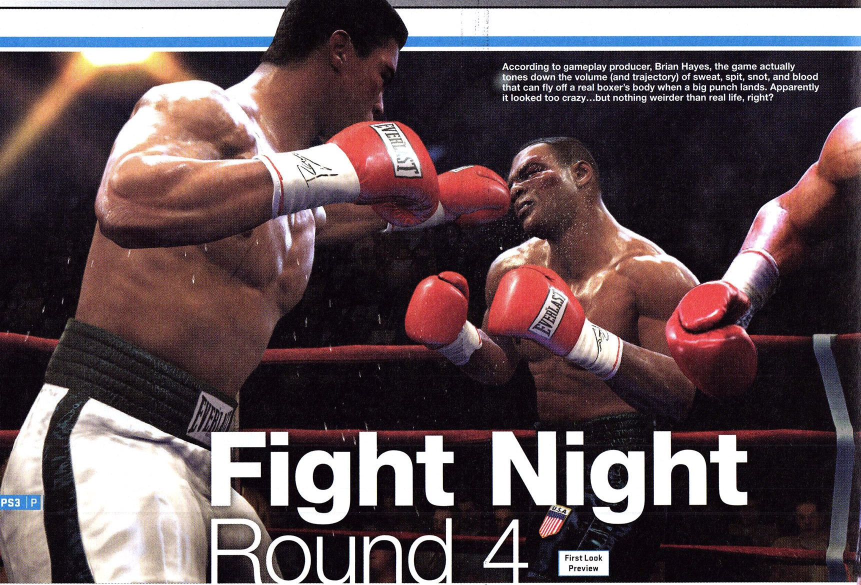


According to gameplay producer, Brian Hayes, the game actually tones down the volume (and trajectory) of sweat, spit, snot, and blood that can fly off a real boxer's body when a big punch lands. Apparently it looked too crazy...but nothing weirder than real life, right?

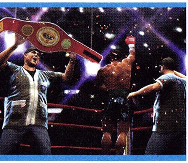
PS3 | P

Fight Night Round 4

First Look Preview

I want to punch your face in!

PS3 GENRE: Sports AVAILABLE: Fall PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Canada

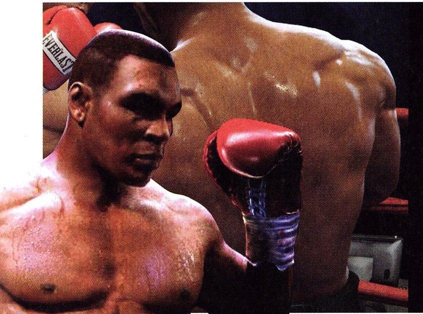


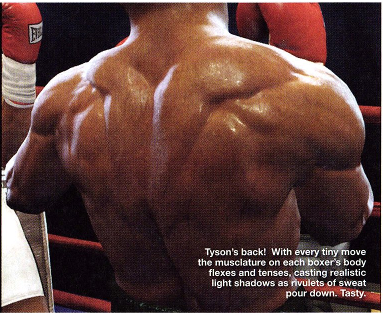
The concept of party games invokes images of board games played by smiling nuclear families or proving (more likely disproving) musical mettle through *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero.* But here's another party offering to consider later in the year: pummeling your friends into bloody pulps courtesy of *Fight Night Round 4.*

Boxing, as a sport, may have become marginalized amid over-promotion, inflated pay-per-view costs, and flip-flopping title holders (we really do like dominant performers like Mike Tyson to root for or enthusiastically against), but in the living room it's competitive gold. Better yet, the pedigree of the last release provides a great foundation for the upgrades and fine-tuning planned for *Round 4.*

Seeing the game in action, gameplay producer Brian Hayes of EA Canada was keen to keep to the message of *FNR4* evolving through a focus on speed, strength, strategy, and style. But it was instantly apparent, even from the pre-release PS3 code we saw running, that the collective improvements will have a significant impact on the overall pugilistic dynamics. As Tyson faced off against Muhammad Ali both boxers, aside from being spitting images of their faces (and body types and sizes—all when they were in their prime), moved with incredibly realistic speed, purpose, and menace.

If you played *Round 3* you'll notice the improved smoothness of the animations and the seemingly pixel-perfect collision detection. The bodies, arms, fists, and face appear solid, and collisions between any





Tyson's back! With every tiny move the musclature on each boxer's body flexes and tenses, casting realistic light shadows as rivulets of sweat pour down. Tasty.

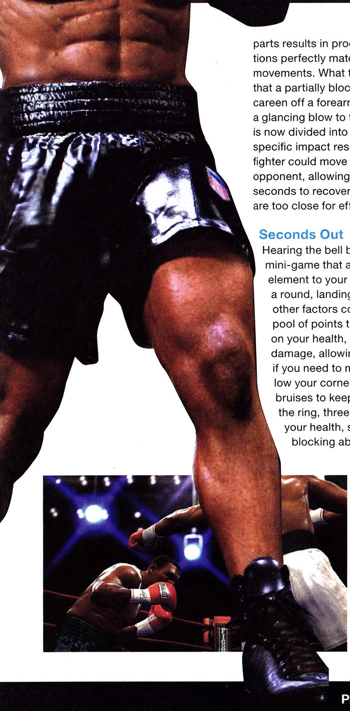
parts results in procedural animations perfectly matching real-world movements. What that means, is that a partially blocked jab could careen off a forearm and still deliver a glancing blow to the eye (the head is now divided into smaller areas for specific impact results). Or a dazed fighter could move in and clinch an opponent, allowing a few valuable seconds to recover as the fighters are too close for effective blows.

Seconds Out

Hearing the bell brings up a new mini-game that adds a strategic element to your bout. Finishing a round, landing punches, and other factors contribute to a pool of points that can be spent on your health, stamina, and damage, allowing you to decide if you need to muscle up or allow your corner to soothe a few bruises to keep you upright. In the ring, three bars represent your health, stamina, and blocking ability (which means you can't permanently hold block, as it decreases in effectiveness as the bar drops), leading to moments where you might stagger, and possibly hit the canvas and start the steady rise to your feet.

We're sure you'll get wound up in the ebb and flow if you choose to create your own character for the Legacy Mode. This time, you'll be able to pick who you fight (depending on your relative rankings), sim through fights you might consider warm-ups, and train between fights to improve your skills when you climb into the ring. Taking this online, you can create a boxer as a light, middle, or heavyweight and take on all-comers with the potential to be crowned world champion.

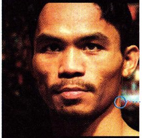
Or you could sit on your couch pummeling the virtual snot out of your closest, dearest friends. With the tweaks, upgrades, and additions to each facet of the pugilistic craft, it should be an even more compelling face-off than *Round 3* delivered. We're all ready to rumble. Rob Smith

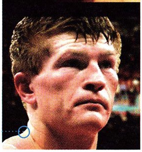


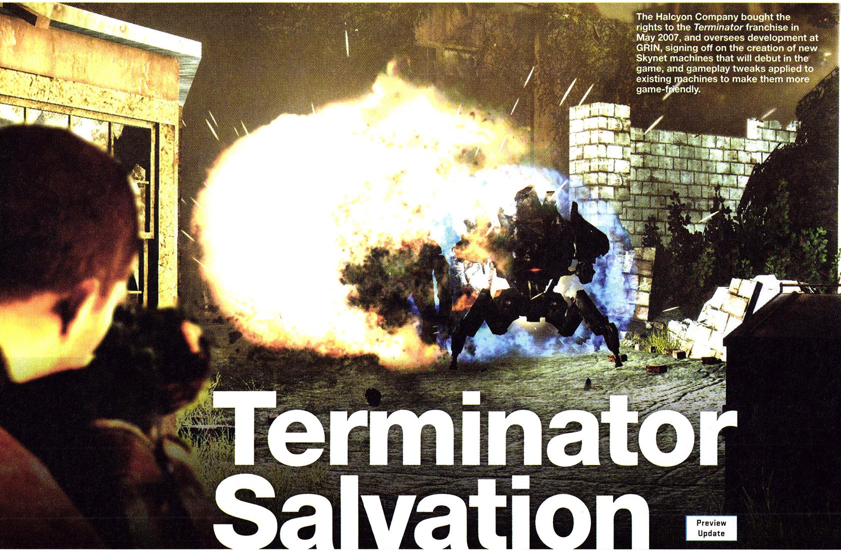
Wanna fight?

Confirmed boxers at press time (from a roster described as "the largest ever for the franchise"), including a couple we can reveal:

Lennox Lewis
Sugar Ray Leonard
Sergio Mora (from *The Contender)*
Emanuel Augustus
Mike Tyson
Muhammad Ali
Winky Wright
RICKY HATTON
MANNY PACQUIAO







The Halcyon Company bought the rights to the *Terminator* franchise in May 2007, and oversees development at GRIN, signing off on the creation of new Skynet machines that will debut in the game, and gameplay tweaks applied to existing machines to make them more game-friendly.

Terminator Salvation

Preview Update

PS3 | P |

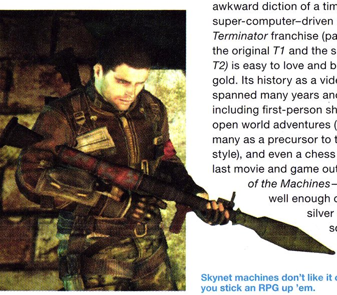
There was one man who taught us to fight...

PS3 GENRE: Third-person Action AVAILABLE: May PUBLISHER: Evolved Games/Warner Bros. Interactive DEVELOPER: GRIN

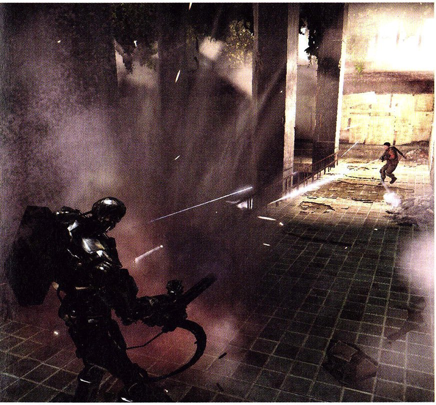
Killing machines. Futuristic freedom fighters. Bad-ass female protagonists. Even dodgy accents paraded as the awkward diction of a time-travelling super-computer–driven robot. The *Terminator* franchise (particularly the original *T1* and the spectacular *T2)* is easy to love and box office gold. Its history as a videogame has spanned many years and iterations, including first-person shooters, open world adventures (likened by many as a precursor to the *GTA* style), and even a chess game! The last movie and game outing—*Rise of the Machines*—performed well enough on both silver and small screen largely by virtue of its legacy and marketing, but neither had critics searching for fresh superlatives.

Well, the marketing machine will be in full effect again around the new movie and its game accompaniment when *Terminator Salvation* hits in May. It'll be odd, though, for those of us that remember gaping in awe at the concept and execution of that stylish original movie: No Ah-nuld. The Governator's new job means no titular role, so the Dark Knight (Christian Bale) will star as resistance fighter John Connor. In the game, you play as Connor, a regular resistance fighter against the Skynet machines in a devastated Los Angeles. You'll witness his development from brave grunt to leader alongside series newcomer Blair (played in the movie by Moon Bloodgood) who'll accompany you through most of this tale.

It's vital that Connor's evolution, and the fighters he befriends and rescues along the way, capture your imagination since we already know that he doesn't defeat Skynet, that it will still exist at the end of the game (and movie). So instead you're hoping to inspire other fighters to the resistance cause. That shouldn't be too hard as the evolving machines find new ways to hunt down humans, including T70s, created exclusively for the game (and looking like they might have come straight from a *Star Wars* movie set (well, animator's screen) after a minor makeover). The flying robots that in the movie serve as intel-gathering machines are armed here to add extra challenge. But you know the drill: you'll be outgunned and outmanned, meaning you have to scavenge, duck, hide, and be vigilant just to stay alive.

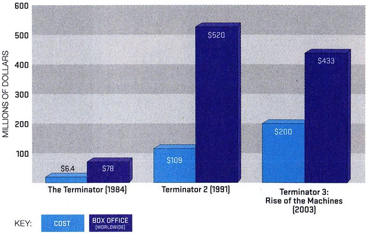


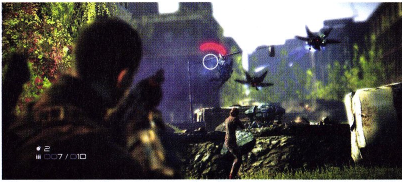
Skynet machines don't like it one bit when you stick an RPG up 'em.



Now would be a really, really good time to take advantage of the game's cover system.

BOX OFFICE SALVATION





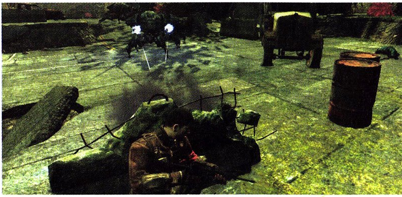
These aerial HK drones don't have guns in the movie, but are armed here!

Take Cover!

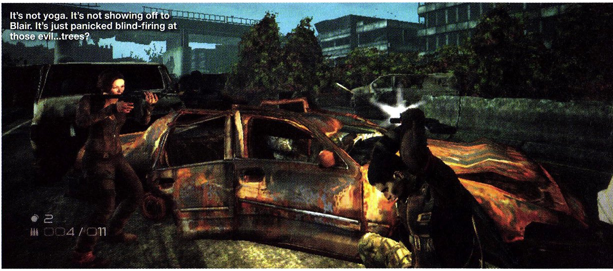
That's where developer GRIN's cover system comes into focus. It might be familiar if you've followed the development of *Wanted: Weapons of Fate,* another game constructed by the same studio. Though resistance fighters can't curve bullets they do need to move around cover points among the bombed out, war-scarred buildings and streets of L.A. Crouched behind a low wall an on-screen interface highlights where you can move to the next safe cover point. From behind pillars and walls you'll take pot shots at the detailed machines using the shotguns, machine guns, and RPGs that form the basis of your arsenal. The action should be intense and dynamic as your apparent cover spot could be destroyed, and you work to protect Blair and other fighters that join your cause (you can play as Blair in the co-op multiplayer mode that should add extra legs to the experience).

What we witnessed in our demo was a relatively straightforward third-person action game. As should be expected from the franchise, each battle situation looked hopeless, but with the help of your resistance buddies and decent aim you could muddle through. Of course, that's a requirement of John Connor. After disobeying an order from his commander to leave a couple of fighters behind after an assault on the Skynet Command Center, Connor goes it alone, and in the process proves that he's brave and tenacious (if unable to follow a superior officer's orders).

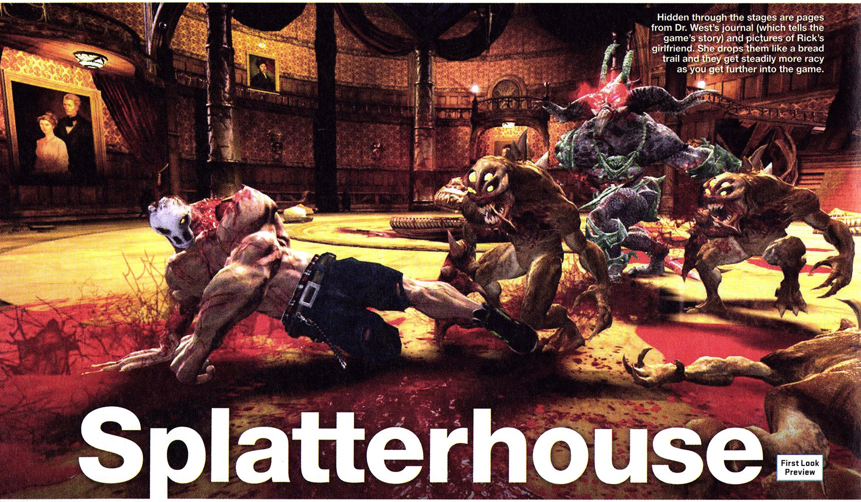
Whether he's dominant enough to carry this game through to critical and commercial success on the powerful PS3 is a question we'll answer in a couple of months. We're hoping for the best. Rob Smith



Any masonry, no matter how randomly placed, can provide life-saving cover.



It's not yoga. It's not showing off to Blair. It's just panicked blind-firing at those evil...trees?



Hidden through the stages are pages from Dr. West's journal (which tells the game's story) and pictures of Rick's girlfriend. She drops them like a bread trail and they get steadily more racy as you get further into the game.

Splatterhouse

First Look Preview

Drip, drop, kerplunk, SPLAT

PS3 **GENRE:** Action **AVAILABLE:** Q3 **PUBLISHER:** Namco Bandai **DEVELOPER:** BottleRocket Entertainment

PS3 | P

A Bloody Legacy

The original *Splatterhouse* released in Japanese arcades in 1988 (a year later in North America) and was later ported (and toned down) for the TurboGrafx-16, FM Towns, and PC. Some significant differences between the arcade and console versions: The mask was adjusted to be more skull-like to avoid comparisons with Jason Voorhees, blood levels were slightly decreased, and several religious symbols were removed. The original arcade game was actually quite… Satanic. But the upcoming *Splatterhouse* seems to lean towards more blood and less creepy symbolism.

Think about the literal meaning of this game's name for a moment: Splatterhouse. A house of splatter. If you didn't play the original *Splatterhouse* in the '80s, the word is almost…comical. After all, "splat" is the noise cartoons make when they plummet onto cement. Or when you squish a beetle. It's a parody of violence, meant to be harmless and funny.

If you *did* play the original game, on the other hand, you're probably not laughing. For you, the word "splatterhouse" most likely evokes images of grisly, not-at-all-humorous violence, and depending on how old you were when you played it, perhaps memories of nighttime bedwettings as well. But if you were brave enough to keep playing, you probably loved every second of the side-scrolling, fright-filled, beat-'em-up action as you explored West Mansion.

For this 2009 remake, BottleRocket Entertainment hopes to balance *both* of those elements. Gruesome, over-the-top, eye-popping (perhaps literally?), third-person violence that's true to the original, tempered slightly by a tongue-in-cheek tone and modernized by hi-def graphics and a more complete story.

A horrific tale

Like in the original, Rick Taylor wanders through West Mansion searching for his girlfriend (which takes him through the mansion grounds, as well as into the decaying ruins of its inner layers where he'll find weird "portals" that lead to other stages), and dons a mysterious (and in this version, talkative) mask, which grants him unnatural strength and regenerative abilities.

On this journey he'll encounter dozens of undead enemies, but they'll all have one trait in common: they bleed. Shiny, bright red liquid pouring—nay, gushing—out of their bodies as Rick abuses them in a multitude of ways, even smearing the camera with the remains.

Bloodfest

Take, for example, one particular moment in the demo I saw. Rick has hopped through one of Dr. West's experimental portals and found himself in an abandoned carnival. It's dark and creepy, and an old carousel creaks in the distance. Suddenly, zombie clowns crawl out of the ground. And then, we dive into the violence.

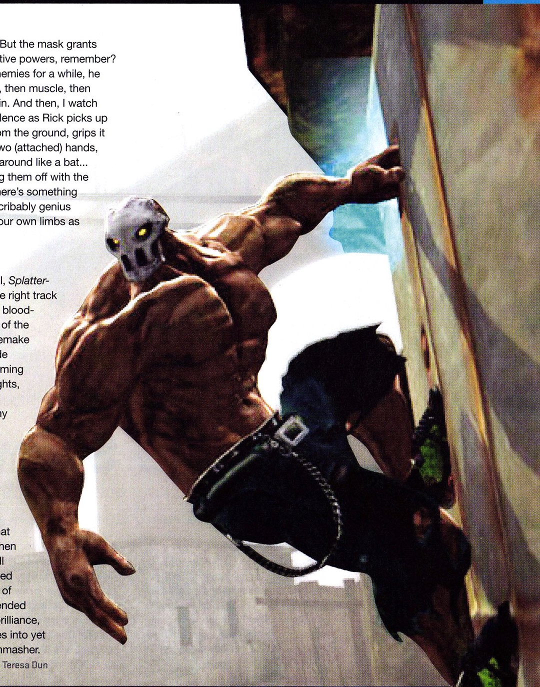
Rick slams his fist into the face of the first clown. Blood splatters. Rick weakens the second clown with a few quick kicks, forcing the zombie to the ground, and finishes him off by stomping the clown hard in the chest. Blood streams out of the corpse. The third enemy Rick easily rips in half with his bare hands (you have to see it to get the impact), and of course, blood sprays all over the place. Grabbing a fourth enemy by the legs, Rick swings him around in full circles, knocking the rest of the enemies off their feet, and then flings the clown into the distance to land in a pool of blood. He chucks a cinderblock at a fifth enemy (Rick's able to use other weapons as well, like 2x4s, chainsaws, and machetes), and blood spews from the clown's wound. As a finishing touch, Rick performs a Splatter Kill on the last enemy, and the zombie clown's head comes off (Splatter Kills differ depending on the weapon you're holding and the enemy you're fighting), and the camera is, well, splattered with blood to celebrate successfully, ahem, executing your special move.

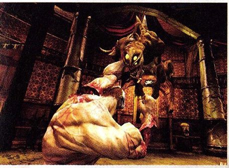
Notice a pattern? (Hint: the game is aptly named.) Now, what happens when the enemies get the upper hand? Soon after the abandoned carnival segment, a crowd of zombies led by an Aggressor (that makes normal zombies around him more powerful) overwhelms Rick. As they beat on Rick, I watch his skin bruise, split open, and eventually his whole arm tears off. But the mask grants Rick regenerative powers, remember? By evading enemies for a while, he regrows bone, then muscle, then veins, then skin. And then, I watch in stupefied silence as Rick picks up his old arm from the ground, grips it between his two (attached) hands, and swings it around like a bat... literally beating them off with the soggy end. There's something sick yet indescribably genius about using your own limbs as a weapon.

Splatter-y

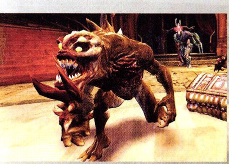
As you can tell, *Splatterhouse* is on the right track to capture the blood-soaked mood of the original. The remake will also include several platforming areas, boss fights, and plenty of updated enemy types, like a giant tentacle that summons worm-like minions, and a bulbous ceiling-grasping creature that spits at you when you pass. We'll keep you posted on whether all of this gore is blended with combat brilliance, or just devolves into yet another buttonmasher.

Teresa Dun

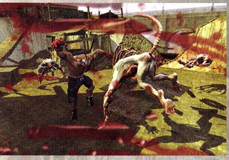




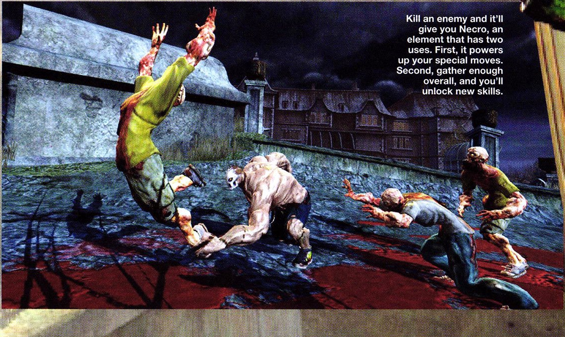
Enemies can latch themselves onto your back. It's worse when it's in swarms.



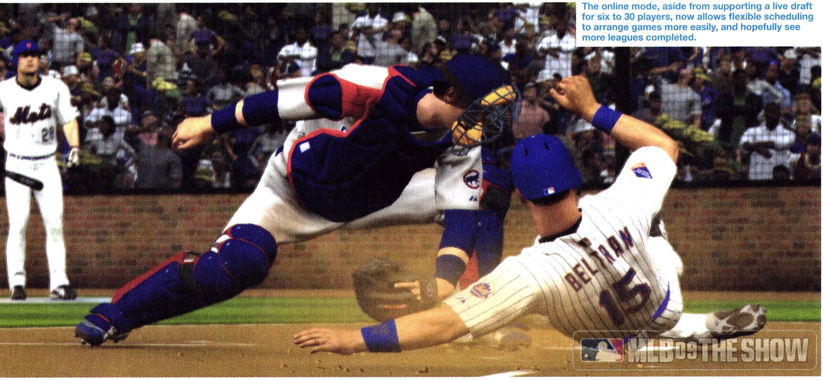
West Mansion has been prettified. The goons living in it on the other hand...



Ah, the camera is smeared with blood. A beautiful example of a Splatter Kill.



Kill an enemy and it'll give you Necro, an element that has two uses. First, it powers up your special moves. Second, gather enough overall, and you'll unlock new skills.

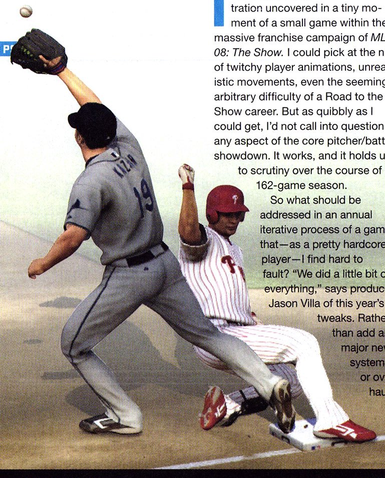


The online mode, aside from supporting a live draft for six to 30 players, now allows flexible scheduling to arrange games more easily, and hopefully see more leagues completed.

MLB 09: The Show

The baseball sim king goes small ball

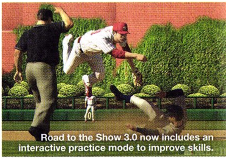
PS3 GENRE: Sports AVAILABLE: April PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Sony San Diego



I could quibble about the odd frustration uncovered in a tiny moment of a small game within the massive franchise campaign of *MLB 08: The Show.* I could pick at the nits of twitchy player animations, unrealistic movements, even the seemingly arbitrary difficulty of a Road to the Show career. But as quibbly as I could get, I'd not call into question any aspect of the core pitcher/batter showdown. It works, and it holds up to scrutiny over the course of a 162-game season.

So what should be addressed in an annual iterative process of a game that—as a pretty hardcore player—I find hard to fault? "We did a little bit of everything," says producer Jason Villa of this year's tweaks. Rather than add any major new systems or overhaul particular functions, this year sounds to be one of nips and tucks. That's clearly the case when the first addition to the new game mentioned in our chat with Villa and Senior Producer Chris Gill is the outfielders' route to the ball! Don't get me wrong, as a longtime fan, it's a welcome improvement that should add more realistic timing to outfield hits and the base runners' opportunities to advance or score. But it's hardly headline grabbing.

Another tweak is the addition of over 50 new tags that recognizes where a throw is coming from and how a base runner might be moving or sliding. A new system will add detail to those third-strike calls with a ball in the dirt that requires the catcher to grab and tag the hitter. These details delve further into the actual abilities of each player. "It was the case last year when pretty much any ball at any pace hit to the side of an infielder would get snagged," explains Villa, "not so this year as we factor in fielding ability and reaction time, and how hard the ball was hit." So we should expect to see a few more knockdowns and a few more errors, which should lead to more realistic season totals.



Road to the Show 3.0 now includes an interactive practice mode to improve skills.

Who wants the view from the cheap seats?

For those players truly wanting to stamp their own style on the action, you can record your own Sounds of the Show. Cheers and jeers are recorded using any supported headset/mic (or PS Eye), imported into the game, and applied to any particular player. When that player then comes up to bat you'll be able to hear your heckles as part of the background ambient sounds. Sweet.

Seriously, it won't take much to suck us back in, but the tucks and fixes should be enough to satisfy for another long season. Rob Smith

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JUJU
they are in juju
THEY ARE

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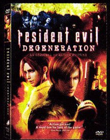
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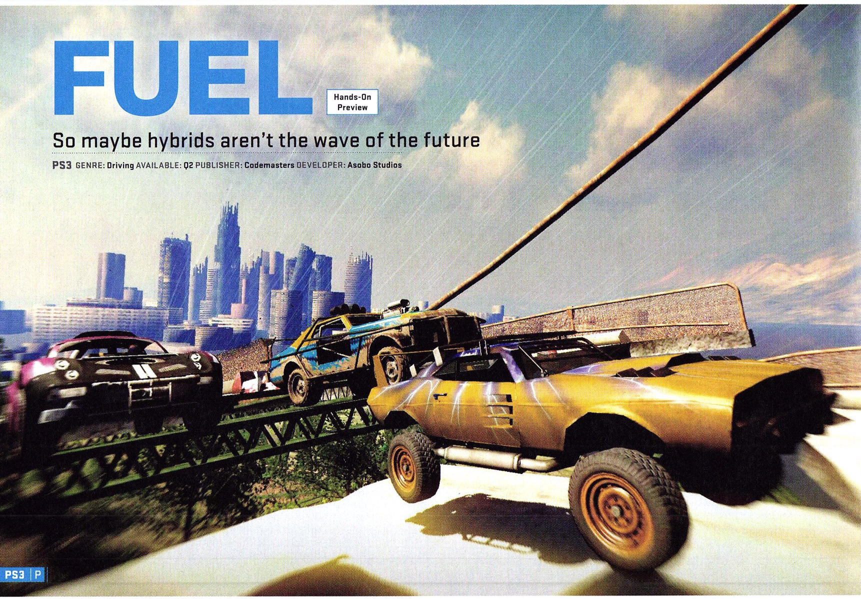
FUEL

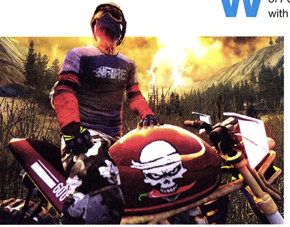
Hands-On Preview

So maybe hybrids aren't the wave of the future

PS3 GENRE: **Driving** AVAILABLE: **Q2** PUBLISHER: **Codemasters** DEVELOPER: **Asobo Studios**



When the first screenshots of *FUEL* were released with scant details a couple months ago, it had all the appearance of a post-apocalyptic driving game in the *Mad Max/ Road Warrior*-vein. Renegade racers battling it out in jerry-rigged vehicles on the wastelands of the future may not be the most original concept, but it likely would've been an easy sell to gamers.


"Do you hear thunder?" Weather cycles can affect races and add further variation to track surfaces. The tornados are particularly awesome.

As details now emerge from Codemasters, the storyline has taken a not-quite-so-apocalyptic, environmentally conscious turn as *FUEL's* America of the future is suffering the devastating effects of global warming. Extreme floods, storms, fires, tornadoes, and hurricanes have driven most people to safe zones to escape the effects of Mother Earth's hotheaded weather tantrums. While I can appreciate the "Live Green!" messaging, the inconvenient truth is that *FUEL's* worldview looks pretty good to me as it finally rids the roads of fast-lane–clogging Prius drivers.

So what to do when the people turn to renewable energy and there's suddenly vast stretches of uninhabited wilderness? Why any self-respecting adrenaline-fiend gamer…nay, *American!*…is going to take that windfall of fossil fuel and start depleting it! Yes, it's time to embrace our fate, hit the road in our high-horsepower suicide machines, and revel in the bounty of our country's natural wonders.

Don't fence me in

Minutes into *FUEL,* you'll notice that this is one driving game where the vehicles aren't the stars. Instead, you're literally awestruck by majestic views and the sheer size and scale of the environment (see sidebar for the measurements). The locales could come straight from postcards of notable western U.S. landmarks collected during a summer vacation road trip. Although the landmarks and territories in the game are closer in proximity to each other than in real-life, each of the regions are huge and you can travel uninterrupted from one end of the map to the other if you're so inclined—just make sure you hit the bathroom before you embark.

Since creating such huge, realistic landscapes would be a monumental task, if not impossible, using traditional fabrication methods, Asobo Studios utilized a process called Procedural Generation to create the expansive open-world environment. The process utilizes real-world satellite data coupled with terraforming algorithms to create topography that realistically and naturally depicts and melds a variety of surface-types and terrain characteristics.

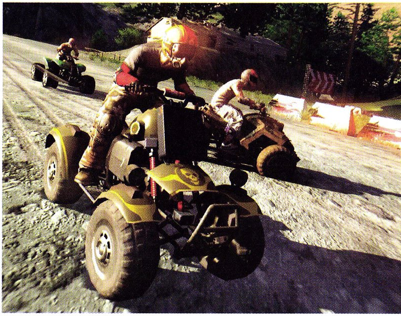
If I had any doubt about whether the process works, it was alleviated when I headed off the main road on a Quad during my playtest. I encountered a narrow dirt trail that snaked up the side of a large hill. If I veered to one side I would tumble down the hillside, while the other side of the trail presented a slope impossible to climb. The way the trail nestled into the side of the hill seemed perfectly natural as I continued to follow it until it deposited me at the summit. My secret trail would still be there if I ever returned to the location, but considering the size of the map, it could have just as easily been bypassed and never discovered.

Are we there yet?

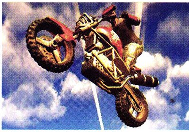
But enough about the sightseeing. At its core *FUEL* is about racing, and with a collection of over 75 vehicles consisting of muscle cars, trucks, motorcycles, quads, buggies, and dragsters, there'll never be a dearth of horsepower options as you face the 70-odd structured challenges found in Career mode. The variety of events include Point A-to-B Time Trials, Checkpoint-based Attack races, lap-oriented Circuit races, and the no-holds-barred checkpoint-less Raid races that can last from 15 minutes to up to four real hours! Victories earn fuel, which can be spent to unlock more races, vehicles, and upgrades for your ever-growing fleet of rides.

The Circuit event I raced was tightly designed and a sharp, stylistic contrast from the less-constrained Checkpoint race I also sampled. My attention was more clearly focused on my race opponents on the smaller track, while successfully navigating the terrain was my most prominent concern in the cross-country race. A smart and handy GPS system points out the most appropriate route for your vehicle-type (but also suggests riskier, but potentially quicker paths) and helps you keep your bearings during the free-for-all races.

When I usually encounter a driving game at this stage of its development, my main criteria for gauging its ultimate success is whether the developer succeeds in dialing in the handling feel of the vehicles. In *FUEL's* case, the overriding question in my mind is whether Asobo Studios can find a balance between the huge awe-inspiring environments and the close-quarters competition that's key to a great racing game. We're hopeing *FUEL* is more than just a scenic drive. Roger Burchill



Play with up to 15 other players online. Like a tiny MMO, the game replaces people as you drive away with those closer to your ever-changing location.



Each vehicle-type has various advantages and disadvantages depending on terrain.

Size Matters

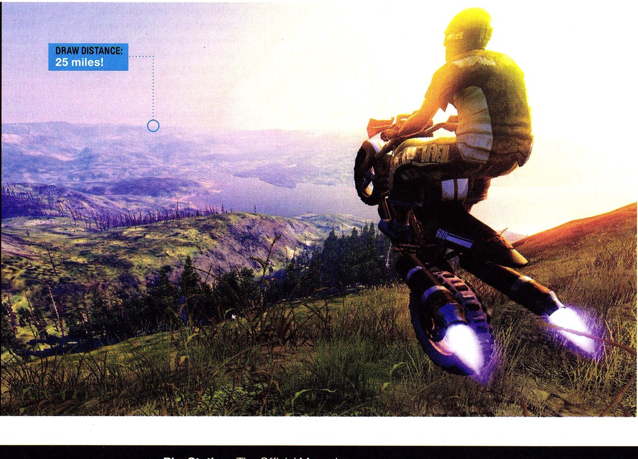
Codemasters claims that *FUEL* sports the largest environment ever created for a racing game, and we don't doubt it:

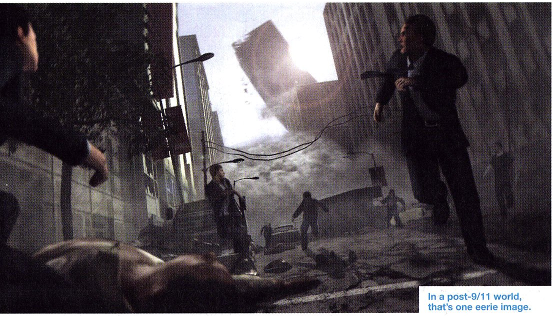
TOTAL WORLD SIZE:
8,700 square miles
(That's equivalent to the state of New Jersey.)

ROADS, TRACKS, TRAILS:
Over 100,000 miles
(About 20 roundtrips between L.A. and New York.)

TOTAL TERRITORIES: **19**

INCLUDING:
- **Yellowstone Park**
- **Utah badlands**
- **The Grand Canyon**
- **Monument Valley**
- **Lookout Mountain**
- **Devil's Tower**
- **Arizona**
- **New Mexico**
- **Crater Lake**
- **Mount Rainier**





In a post-9/11 world, that's one eerie image.

I Am Alive

First Look Preview

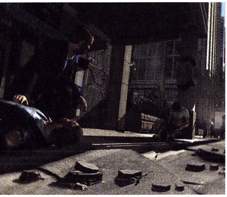
A test of your moral fiber. How will you survive?

PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Survival Adventure PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Darkworks

Ubisoft recently introduced *I Am Alive* with this quote from Italian socialist author Ignazio Silone: "An earthquake achieves what the law promises but doesn't in practice maintain—the equality of all men." When you hang your game's hat on the philosophies of a controversial World War II Italian wordsmith who may or may not have spied for the Americans, it's clear you're aiming high.

I Am Alive is not based on anything Silone wrote, of course, but the aim is to invoke that philosophy in an interactive environment: to create an equal playing field, strip away the rules that bind society, and see what boils to the surface. As a gamer that means making choices. Who to save or kill? Do you search for survivors or food? Money or water? Will you help or hinder a rescue? What could have been a standard survival game is turning into a complex glimpse into your soul.

Set in Chicago in the middle of a sweltering June heat wave, a massive earthquake destroys the city leaving you with choices to make. You play as Adam Collins, a 24-year-old junior executive who, two hours earlier, was enjoying an expensive coffee and wondering how he was going to get the exclusive corner office. Now his only goal is to find his girlfriend Alice, who is lost somewhere in the city. The devastating earthquake has toppled skyscrapers, collapsed bridges, and sealed off the city from civilization. It has created an island nightmare where Silone's vision of equality, of a rules-free society, has come true. In this new society you don't buy expensive takeout coffee, you take it.



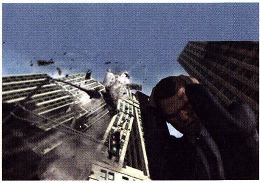
The lone gun that's been announced has no bullets. It's only for bluffing...

Making core choices

Played in first-person perspective, this adventure demands you rescue, steal, protect, attack, or heal. Lawlessness has erupted on the streets so to find Alice you'll need to gain access to hidden and secure areas. New factions emerge as stragglers form into loose associations. A doctor named Riley has decided to stay in the city and help as many survivors as she can. Maybe she'll help you if you can locate injured people and lead them to her.

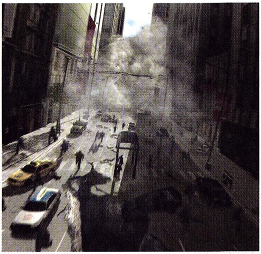
A fireman, Peter, wants you to bring stragglers to his makeshift refugee camp. Elsewhere, Vigil is an ex-soldier protecting a group of helpless survivors; again, help him and he'll help you. The concept is a choice-driven FPS in a similar vein to *BioShock,* where decisions and alliances determine where you can go and what eventually happens to Alice and Adam. The game will span nine days, suggesting progress is made sporadically with the game opening or unlocking areas of the story depending on you reaching certain milestones. There's also the whisper of a deeper conspiracy that points to a man-made reason behind the earthquake. We can't wait to dig deeper into Ubisoft's rubble. Pass the pickax.

Ian Dean

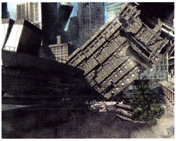


Adam is a civilian, not a fighter. This is survival horror without the demons and gothic imagery.

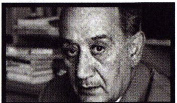
Supernatural underpinnings? The trailer hints that a Maori god of thunder was involved in the earthquake...or perhaps there's a convoluted, man-made conspiracy behind it?



Rescue crews are suspiciously absent...



Even after the initial quake, expect buildings to be incredibly dangerous.



Did You Know

Ignazio Silone was the pseudonym of Secondo Tranquilli, an Italian author. He was born in the town of Pescina in the Abruzzo region in 1900 and lost many family members, including his mother, in the 1915 Avezzano earthquake. His father had died in 1911. Silone eventually became leader of the Italian Socialist Party.

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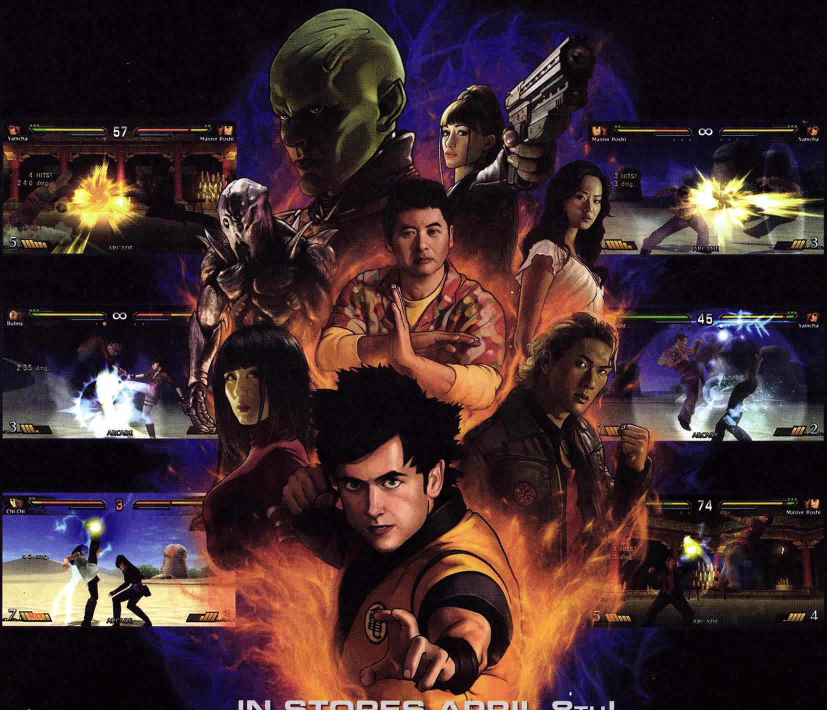
Yamcha
57
Master Roshi
4 HITS!
246 dmg.
ARCADE
Master Roshi
∞
Yamcha
3 HITS!
3 dmg.
ARCADE
Bulma
∞
235 dmg.
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45
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Chi Chi
3
MAX
ARCADE
74
Master Roshi
4 HITS!
3 dmg.
ARCADE

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TEEN
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ESRB

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Violence

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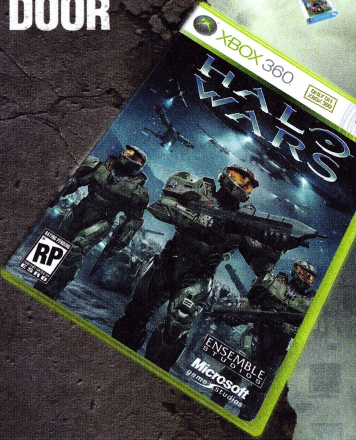

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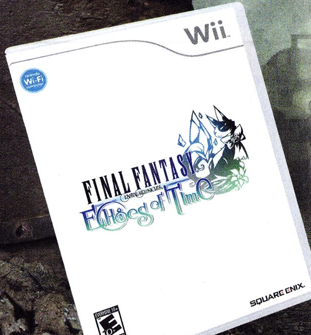

Wii
Wi-Fi
FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES
Echoes of Time
SQUARE ENIX.
EVERYONE 10+
E
Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB

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PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION

MY FELLOW GAMERS, OUR PS3 UNION IS STRONG. MY FELLOW GAMERS, OUR PS3 UNION IS STRONG.
MY FELLOW GAMERS, OUR PS3 UNION IS STRONG. MY FELLOW GAMERS, OUR PS3 UNION IS STRONG.

01

What chance of seeing Kratos' forgotten brother, too? He was cast into the underworld and left vowing revenge, as was detailed in an unlockable movie from the original *God of War!* (You can check it out at: http://tinyurl.com/6qus4d)

PART ONE: The Games

What better statement can there be of PlayStation 3's future and potential than a complete outline of the games heading to the platform in the months (even years) ahead? Console platform success is always defined by the games that it delivers. Fans will butt heads about hardware specifications and technical features (and we're not taking anything away from key attributes like Blu-ray, built-in wireless broadband connectivity, and free online play) but it's the games that will shape the legacy. So what can we expect? How much can we expect? We've scoured the gaming globe to illustrate how your platform of choice is the one to keep you entertained and inspired with the very best in gaming. This is the story you can cut out and keep for a year at least, and keep gazing upon it in awe and anticipation. (Oh, and we numbered them, but in no particular order...apart from the first one!)

GOD OF WAR III

DEV: SONY SANTA MONICA | PUB: SCEA | DUE: LATE 2009

Oh, Sony Santa Monica, why must you toy with our emotions? Teasing us with awe-inspiring trailers and art (as if the mere prospect of the third *God of War* game weren't enough) yet refusing to reveal any substantial information despite our constant pleas and unyielding desire for more...it's downright cruel!

But even though we've been left out in the cold for the past few months, we can't help but feel thoroughly optimistic about both the game itself and its inevitable impact on the PS3 as a whole. So, in the interest of stoking the fires of that optimism, here's what we know (and a little of what we *think* we know) about *God of War III.*

GOD IS (NOT) DEAD

According to Sony, this will be the final game in the *God of War* series, meaning regardless of how exactly the events of *GoW III* unfold, this will be Kratos' last adventure. And while this news might seem a bit dismaying, we've got two reasons why this is, in all likelihood, substantially more positive than it may appear.

First, this almost certainly means that Kratos will finally exact his revenge on the Pantheon of Greek gods by launching an assault on Mount Olympus and fighting all-mighty Zeus himself. The word "epic" is such a staggering understatement that it's laughable. Second, it's entirely possible that it isn't true. Prequels, side stories, any number of different areas in the *GoW* universe could still be explored.

HAND TO GOD

But before we get ahead of ourselves and start thinking about *GoW IV,* lets take a moment to reflect on a few of the most exciting features of *GoW III*: new moves, new weapons, and new technology. December's gameplay trailer showed off a fancy new wall-running maneuver that's potentially indicative of acrobatic, platforming elements mixed in with the combat, adding a princely Persian flavor to the ancient Greek production.

The trailer also contained a few clear shots of Kratos sporting a giant pair of lion's head gauntlets. It's unclear exactly how you'll be able to employ these new weapons, but the trailer shows Kratos throwing an impressively massive pile of enemies dozens of feet into the air. Kratos with (even more) super strength? Let's hope so!

And if all this isn't enough to get you excited, here's what series creator David Jaffe had to say after seeing the game up and running: "I ain't no fanboy but this mother-[badness] game looks like nothing you've ever played...and you can hold me to that when this thing hits, and when they start showing gameplay footage. It looks like a painting come to life—it's *that* good looking."

02

UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

DEV: NAUGHTY DOG
PUB: SCEA | DUE: LATE '09

In the original *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune,* our rugged hero Nathan Drake frequented many a jungle-covered tomb on a quest first begun by his long-distant ancestor Sir Francis Drake (who, we were informed, didn't die quite when history thought.) The sequel, *Among Thieves,* continues this rich seam of unreported history by wondering what exactly happened to Marco Polo's contingent during his journey back from the Far East in 1292.

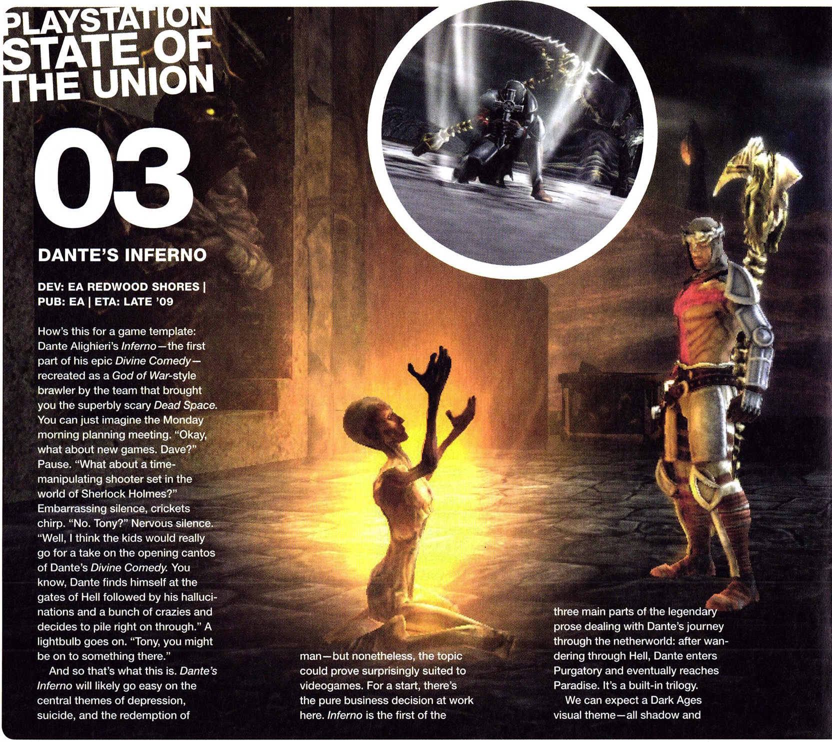
Developer Naughty Dog intends to extrapolate on the final words of Marco Polo—that in his writings, he "didn't say half of what he saw." And what he saw, apparently, begins with his lost fleet of 600 ships, but rapidly accelerates towards the Tibetan city of Shambhala (also known as Shangri-La) and the Cintmani Stone, an artifact said to reside there that grants the wishes of whoever holds it.

Jungles, then, are pretty much out of the picture, and bleak snowy vistas and a war-torn variation on the politically troubled country of Nepal take their place. At first glance this makes *Uncharted 2* appear very different from the original game. Take the bomb-damaged Nepalese city that Drake must negotiate by pretending to be a journalist, for example. Its beautiful color and fluttering, war torn flags all seem a million miles away from the temple ledges of the first game, until you start to realize the broken walls of the crumbling city still allow for that familiar gameplay.

Drake's combat and platforming will be merged more seamlessly this time around: You'll be able to shoot while clinging to walls. Enemies patrol the city's dank alleyways, giving you room to play stealthily and take them out unaware. Action is planned to be more cinematic, and Nate now has the ability to grab street furniture to use as a shield.

So far we've seen impressively realistic animations, convincing facial expressions, and more endearingly weary utterings of Drake's well-written lines. The acting and script, much of it ad-libbed, were already equal to the high quality set by the original, and Naughty Dog claims they're going one better with Drake's shadier side getting an airing. We already knew he wasn't a clean-cut all-American hero, so *Among Thieves'* primary intention is to get us to understand what makes him tick. Drake also has a new squeeze—the delightful Chloe—whose role in the game isn't yet clear, but will be one of the many aspects of *Uncharted 2* worth exploring.

PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION



03

DANTE'S INFERNO

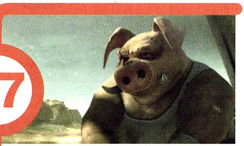
DEV: EA REDWOOD SHORES | PUB: EA | ETA: LATE '09

How's this for a game template: Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*—the first part of his epic *Divine Comedy*—recreated as a *God of War*-style brawler by the team that brought you the superbly scary *Dead Space.* You can just imagine the Monday morning planning meeting. "Okay, what about new games. Dave?" Pause. "What about a time-manipulating shooter set in the world of Sherlock Holmes?" Embarrassing silence, crickets chirp. "No. Tony?" Nervous silence. "Well, I think the kids would really go for a take on the opening cantos of Dante's *Divine Comedy.* You know, Dante finds himself at the gates of Hell followed by his hallucinations and a bunch of crazies and decides to pile right on through." A lightbulb goes on. "Tony, you might be on to something there."

And so that's what this is. *Dante's Inferno* will likely go easy on the central themes of depression, suicide, and the redemption of man—but nonetheless, the topic could prove surprisingly suited to videogames. For a start, there's the pure business decision at work here. *Inferno* is the first of the three main parts of the legendary prose dealing with Dante's journey through the netherworld: after wandering through Hell, Dante enters Purgatory and eventually reaches Paradise. It's a built-in trilogy.

We can expect a Dark Ages visual theme—all shadow and

07

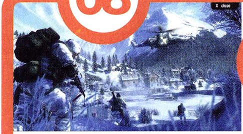


BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL 2

Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft Montpellier | ETA: 2009

BG&E2's design team consists of original creator Michael Ancel, legendary *Final Fantasy* designer Yoshitaka Amano, and French cartoonist Enki Bilal. The game will focus on the future of the planet Hillys and its inhabitants' relationship with animals. And Pey'j will return, we believe. Expect more details later in the year.

08

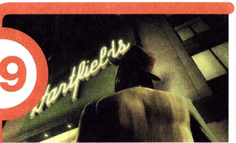


BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

Pub: EA | Dev: DICE | ETA: Late '09

The first game in this new, fresh direction for the vaunted *Battlefield* series was surprisingly robust. Varied first-person modern-war action gameplay, vehicles, and genuine quality writing and voice-acting combined in what was really a sleeper hit. Well, the behind-enemy-lines shenanigans will continue, and (from the one released screenshot) involve snow!

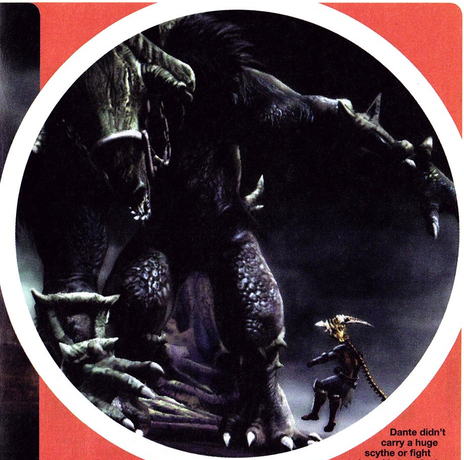
09



L.A. NOIRE

Pub: Rockstar Games | Dev: Team Bondi | ETA: 2010

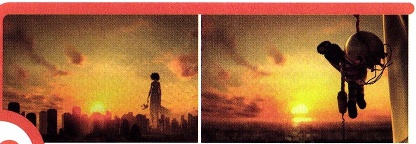
We don't know much about this film noir homage, save for the "perfectly recreated" 1940s L.A. setting mentioned in initial releases. It has dipped in and out of the gamer community consciousness since its first mention, disappearing under the volume of *GTA IV* craziness, then briefly reappearing as a "whatever happened to…" entry when we all asked, "so what's next?"



Dante didn't carry a huge scythe or fight colossal beasts in the *Divine Comedy,* but we'll forgive the revisions.

stinking slops and grotesque mythical creatures—and a quick scan through the office copy of Dante's *Divine Comedy* reveals an opening section depicting a foreboding wood where he's attacked by a series of beasts. Then just as all hope is lost, Virgil comes to his aid (possible co-op?) and helps him to the gates of Hell. Then they must endure a series of tests, such as walking with their heads back-to-front, unable to see the way ahead—classic videogame surrealism.

According to Executive Producer Jonathan Knight: "The time is right for the world of interactive entertainment to adapt this literary masterpiece, and to re-introduce Dante to an audience who, until now, may have been unfamiliar with this great work of art. It's the perfect opportunity to fuse great gameplay with great story." What next: The Old Testament?



10

BIOSHOCK 2: SEA OF DREAMS

Pub: 2K Games | Dev: 2K Marin | ETA: Q4

Part prequel, part sequel is the early rumor, but the grown-up Little Sister and rusting, barnacle covered logo in the teaser indicate this is set after the first game. We've already dissected the available teaser (PTOM, January 2009), but we continue to speculate wildly since as anticipation goes, this one is right up with the very best. And we won't have to wait months after release elsewhere to get this sequel on our fine, Blu-ray–powered system! While we suspect an intended late 2009 release, don't be too surprised if it slips out to 2010. This is one that 2K Games will give all the time necessary to get right, and live up to our soaring expectations.

04

GRAN TURISMO 5

PUB: SCEA | DEV: POLYPHONY | ETA: Q4

With crash physics (surely?) and a car showroom boasting 900+ motors—including unique designs by manufacturers such as Nissan—*Gran Turismo 5* should be worth the wait. 16 players online, the Ferrari license, and *Top Gear* content (the fabulous British car show, now available on BBC America) plus the Test Track, could be just enough to best a *GRID* sequel at the finish line. It's a shock that we even had those thoughts. I mean, how could any true racing sim be considered a pretender to the PlayStation racer's crown? Well, *Prologue* had tided us over for a little while but also managed to undermine some of the franchise's gloss. See, *Gran Turismo* has been a foundation game, a certifiable, slam-dunk, no doubt cash cow in every iteration. Now when the stakes are higher than they've ever been, it needs to deliver.

Though Polyphony boss Kazunori Yamauchi was involved with real-life concept car design (as well as the studio providing the interface engine to the on-board display in the new Nissan GT-R), his attention, we hope, has remained laser-focused on delivering a racing sim deserving of the *Gran Turismo* name.

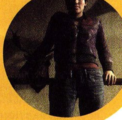
05

TEAM ICO

PUB: SCEJ | DEV: TEAM ICO | ETA: 2009/2010

"It may use the same theme of "hold, and perform an action" from *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus,"* suggests Producer Fumito Ueda of *Ico 3* (name TBC). Our only other clue is a teaser image from a Sony recruitment website, sparking a "Fenrir" rumor about a giant wolf chained underground in Norse myth (the shadow in the top right of the image?). We're hoping that we'll get at least a little morsel more information around E3 time in June.

06



HEAVY RAIN

PUB: SCEA | DEV: QUANTIC DREAM | ETA: LATE '09

Heavy Rain's much-touted plot revolves around four different characters. Creator David Cage says the game will focus on good and evil, and will present players with, in his words, "a lot of moral choices." We've seen glimpses of a murder scene by train tracks, a train station, and a few other buildings, all drenched by seemingly perpetual rain, but so many more questions remain.

PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION

11-24

Another batch

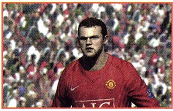
To whet the appetite…

PUB: UBISOFT | **DEV:** UBISOFT | **ETA:** 2009/2010

11 ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

The biggest clue about Altair's PS3 sequel is that…it's wet. One member of Ubisoft's *Prince Of Persia* team revealed in an interview that he saw Altair swim. Clues in the first game's ending (the mad scribbles in the test room that you see with your Eagle Vision) hint at an Eastern, perhaps Japanese, setting.

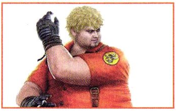
PUB: EA SPORTS | **DEV:** EA SPORTS | **ETA:** OCT



12 FIFA 2010

How far do you innovate from a position of strength? EA Sports already leads the way with updated commentary packs and Adidas Live Season updates. They'll need to amplify player differentiation, and—oddly—add some cheap goals, since it was difficult to score with lower league teams. We'd also relish a higher premium on solo skills.

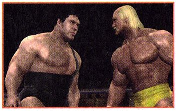
PUB/DEV: NAMCO BANDAI | **ETA:** FALL



13 TEKKEN 6

It seems comically obese characters are *in*. First there's *SF IV's* overweight Rufus, now there's *Tekken's* Bob (above), a podgy bar room pugilist, apparently. Tekken 6's boss will be Azazel, an "embodiment of ultimate evil," who looks like an ancient Egyptian god and can summon flesh-gnawing scarabs.

PUB: THQ | **DEV:** YUKE'S | **ETA:** APR



14 WWE LEGENDS OF WRESTLEMANIA

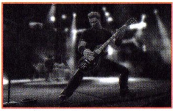
Unlike the increasingly complex *Smackdown,* this is pure arcade wrestling with famous faces from the sport's past, including The Rock, Andre the Giant, and of course, Hulk Hogan. Retelling or recreating history will all be possible through the Relive, Redefine, and Rewrite modes. Good times.

PUB/DEV: CAPCOM | **ETA:** LATE '09

15 BAYONETTA

Devil May Cry-like crazy combat, but in the thigh-high leather boots of an eye-poppingly stylized heroine? Skimpily dressed *Bayonetta* has plenty of tricks up her sleeve, and in her oh-so high heels, including unforgettable guns, magical attacks, and verging-on-AO-rated camera angles.

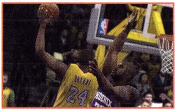
PUB: ACTIVISION | **DEV:** NEVERSOFT | **ETA:** MAR



16 GUITAR HERO: METALLICA

The same *Guitar Hero* we all know and adore, but focused on the music of Metallica. It's the second in the series to take this approach, after *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith,* and aside from the no-brainer tracks from the titular band, it also provides 20 "guest" act songs from the likes of Motörhead, Slayer, and Judas Priest.

PUB/DEV: 2K SPORTS | **ETA:** FALL



17 NBA 2K10

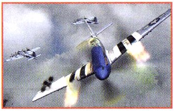
This basketball sim has already taken presentation to a new level. Its tight gameplay is tried and true, so we don't anticipate major overhauls or rewrites for the next annual iteration, but assuming a continued refinement of the existing play mechanics, b-ball fans will have another reason to shell out.

PUB/DEV: CODEMASTERS | **ETA:** FALL

18 DIRT 2

After emerging seemingly from nowhere (certainly for U.S. race fans less savvy about the rallying culture and the sport's late headliner, Colin McRae, than their European counterparts) *DiRT* scored an impressive following. Now it's building on that initial response with broader options and more features.

PUB: ATARI | **DEV:** TRANSMISSION | **ETA:** 2009



19 HEROES OVER EUROPE

Sliding you into the pilot's seat during World War II, *Heroes Over Europe* features over 40 iconic warplanes for you to pick from as you dogfight over London and Berlin. Online multiplayer supports up to 16 players.

PUB/DEV: EIDOS | **ETA:** LATE '09

20 JUST CAUSE 2

Taking place in the Malay Archipelago, this sequel to the underwhelming original showcases advanced AI and a range of different locations for our hero, Rico Rodriguez, to explore. We'll need to see more to boost the excitement factor after the promise of the original fizzled on release.

PUB: THQ | **DEV:** VOLITION | **ETA:** SUMMER

21 RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

Set 50 years after the original *Red Faction* carved up game environments with its—at the time—revolutionary terrain deformation technology, *Guerrilla* returns us to Mars. This sequel will be more open-world than the first game with more destruction. You know, the kind we like: physics-based, environmental, and massive.

PUB: ACTIVISION | **DEV:** RADICAL | **ETA:** Q3

22 PROTOTYPE

Parkour-inspired sandbox adventure *Prototype* puts you in the human shoes of Alex Mercer, and lets you stomp—and more importantly, *shapeshift*—though a living, breathing New York City. After a promising early showing, this one went back into the development pot for a good stir, and we hope will emerge tastier than ever.

PUB: UBISOFT | **DEV:** TBA | **ETA:** TBA

23 AVATAR

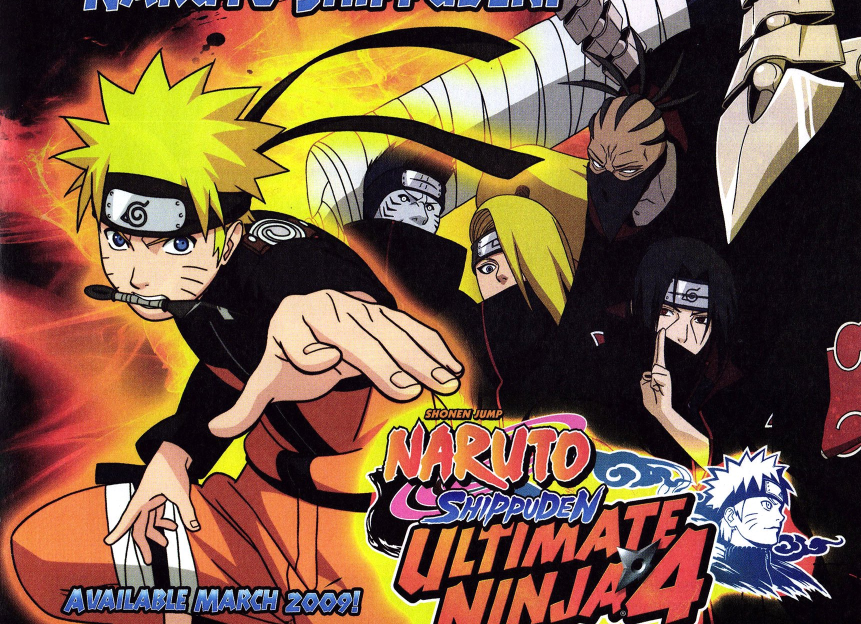
James Cameron has an exciting new sci-fi film hitting theaters in December. It's dubbed by some as the future of CG effects on the silver screen, so game tie-ins are a no-brainer. The story deals with an incredible alien planet called Pandora filled with exotic plants and creatures, and the human race's temptation to exploit it for their own ends.

PUB: TBA | **DEV:** FRONTIER DEV | **ETA:** 2009

24 THE OUTSIDER

Set in Washington D.C., this political thriller sees you on the run from the authorities in our country's capital. It's by David Braben, who old-schoolers who are likely to be English (like Rob) will know as the man who made space classic, *Elite,* so expect freedom of gameplay and massive environments.

ULTIMATE NINJA MEETS NARUTO SHIPPUDEN!



SHONEN JUMP

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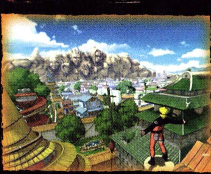
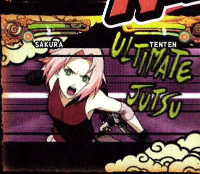


EXPLORE THE MASSIVE WORLD OF NARUTO SHIPPUDEN!



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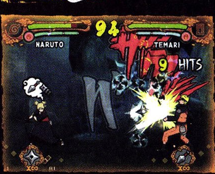

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PlayStation®2

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PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION

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GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME

DEV: TERMINAL REALITY | PUB: ATARI | ETA: JUNE

"This is essentially the third movie"—big, exciting words, coming from Dan Aykroyd, co-writer (along with Harold Ramis) of the storyline for Atari's forthcoming *Ghostbusters: The Video Game.* Set two years after the events of the original film, the game finds our heroes now regular contractors in the unorthodox business of de-spectering New York City. It seems a new Gozer museum exhibit is coming to the city...and, (un-)naturally, all paranormal heck soon breaks loose.

The new ghost-busting Proton Pack is more versatile than ever, with function upgrades featuring stasis-field beams and area-effect blast attacks—not to mention the ability to slam ghosts around the room a bit after you've trapped them, via incessant waggling on the analog stick! Thankfully, original cast actors Bill Murray and Ernie Hudson have also returned to lend their talent (although neither Rick "Keymaster" Moranis nor Sigourney "Gatekeeper" Weaver will be reprising their roles). It's coming to haunt your PS3's HDD in time for the 25th Anniversary of the original theatrical release. *PTOM Pro Tip: If someone asks you if you're a god, say "yes."*

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DEAD RISING 2

PUB: CAPCOM | **DEV:** CAPCOM | **ETA:** LATE '09/EARLY '10

Rumblings of a Winter 2009 unveiling persist, but at press time we're still waiting. Despite hopes of a *Die Hard 2*-style airport location, the smart money's on a fictional Las Vegas (the original was set in the fictional town mall of Willamette, Colorado) replete with shops, corridors, deserts and casinos. The Xbox original ended with reluctant hero Frank West infected, but delaying zombie conversion with ample use of drugs. The shocking news? There are 50 similarly infected kids across the U.S., hidden like ticking undead time bombs.

If they add more absurd weapons (the original let you use garden shears to snip zombies in half, and a lawnmower to trim their numbers), fix the gamer-hating save structure, and retain the crowd scenes, this'll give the patient PS3 crowd plenty to cheer about.

35

BATMAN:ARKHAM ASYLUM

PUB: WARNER BROS | **DEV:** ROCKSTEADY GAMES | **ETA:** LATE '09

You read the stunning Frank Miller-penned graphic novel, *The Dark Knight Returns,* right or Grant Morrison's evocative *A Serious House on a Serious Earth?* If not, both are absolute must-own, must-read examples of how the comic book craft really is art. They won't necessarily help your appreciation for the stylish treatment UK-based Rocksteady Games is applying to Batman's world and mythology, but at least you'll get a grasp of where they're coming from.

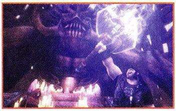
In the game, the inmates, or more pointedly, the Joker has taken over the asylum...with Batman trapped inside. Rather than fight enemies head-on however, you have to psyche them out before sweeping in quietly for the takedown. Visually it's impressive and stylistically it appears an honorable nod to the source comic material. And if you stick with us, you'll find out a whole lot more...next month!

PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION

36-49

And still more to come…

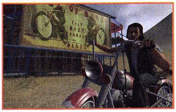
PUB: EA | **DEV:** DOUBLE FINE | **ETA:** LATE '09



36 BRÜTAL LEGEND

The brainchild of former LucasArts legend Tim Schafer (*Monkey Island* games, *Grim Fandango*), this action adventure features the voice of Jack Black and uses heavy metal music as the inspiration for a wild ride through dreams (or nightmares). With Schafer's involvement we sit up and take notice, and you should, too.

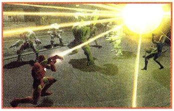
PUB: DEEP SILVER | **DEV:** DEEP SILVER | **ETA:** Q2



37 RIDE TO HELL

Don your leathers, grow a full face of hair, and strap on your shotgun to deal with rival biker gangs in *Ride to Hell*. Free-roaming and rough, *Ride to Hell* will immerse you in 1960s' biker culture. Because the gaming fraternity has been crying out for such an opportunity.

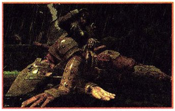
PUB: ACTIVISION | **DEV:** TBD | **ETA:** LATE '09



38 MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 2: FUSION

The original was a great use of the license, but there was still room for improvement, and fortunately the developers are getting that chance. The strategic use of the Marvel heroes made the comic fans giddy. Expect more in the same vein with an expanded roster, more options to customize, and impressively further-improved online play.

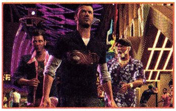
PUB: SOUTHPEAK | **DEV:** FUZZYEYES | **ETA:** 2009



39 EDGE OF TWILIGHT

A third-person action-adventure that involves a character shifting between night and light forms to solve puzzles and achieve objectives. After showing off its charms at TGS 2008, we expect to see more on this quirky effort in the coming months.

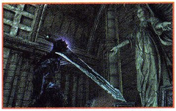
PUB: MIDWAY GAMES | **DEV:** SURREAL | **ETA:** Q3



40 THIS IS VEGAS

Swimming, hopefully with purpose, in the sea of confusion amid the Midway meltdown, this open-world Vegas lifestyle sim showed promise if you desired a virtual life of cutting a rug in nightclubs, slapping down a few costumed mascots, and building a career…that can only happen in Vegas.

PUB: THQ | **DEV:** VIGIL GAMES | **ETA:** Q2



41 DARKSIDERS: WRATH OF WAR

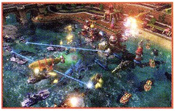
A rare chance to actually *be* war, rather than just take part in it. Become one of the Four Horsemen and fight angels and demons in order to prevent an impending apocalypse. This premise has been kicked around for years in the game space, and always appears to get so far before ditching in the Sea of Vaporware. Maybe this time…

PUB: MTV GAMES | **DEV:** HARMONIX | **ETA:** LATE '09

42 HARMONIX BEATLES GAME

With such a groundbreaking license and rich back catalogue as inspiration, they need to make this so much more than just another *Rock Band* variation. But development is surely straightforward, and background licensing issues have to be the hold-up in getting it to market. No worry, we'll wait and consume immediately upon release.

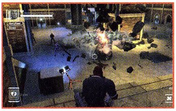
PUB: EA | **DEV:** EA | **ETA:** APRIL



43 COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3

An all-star cast (and it's a mix of A, B, and C-listers, and Jenny McCarthy) commit to their Allied, Soviet, and Empire of the Rising Sun roles while the tried-and-true real-time strategy gameplay has been tweaked superbly for the PS3 controller. And we still believe its success on our platform could make or break the genre!

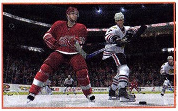
PUB: SOE | **DEV:** SOE SEATTLE | **ETA:** WINTER



44 THE AGENCY

We thought we had an idea of what this massively multiplayer spy-themed action-RPG would deliver. But since going into hiding for the past several months, it's now tricky to guesstimate its direction. We expect to see more in the next couple of months that will make it a big blip on our PS3 radar.

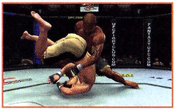
PUB: EA SPORTS | **DEV:** EA SPORTS | **ETA:** SEPT



45 NHL 10

To prove the point Roger makes (on page 9), sports games don't get no love. But they should, and EA's *NHL* franchise should be smooching up a storm given how much it has put out over the years. How do you build on full team online play, and super-smooth on-ice animations? But we hope…

PUB: THQ | **DEV:** YUKE'S | **ETA:** MAY



46 UFC 2009 UNDISPUTED

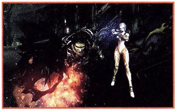
Mix boxing, wrestling, and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, supply a locked cage, and allow the baddest brawlers on the planet to go at it with minimal supervision. Yuke's is using a new engine for the latest *UFC* and, with promising online capabilities, maybe you too can lose teeth and force tapouts…virtually.

PUB: EA | **DEV:** HARMONIX | **ETA:** SPRING

47 AC/DC LIVE: ROCK BAND

Going head-to-head with *Guitar Hero: Metallica*, this special version of the music game will feature loads of songs from the band's epic history. So what's not to love? If you're too young to appreciate AC/DC, don't worry, most of our staff is in the same boat.

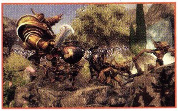
DEV: TECMO | **PUB:** TECMO | **ETA:** LATE '09



48 QUANTUM THEORY

No doubt the living tower concept, stylized art design, and action gameplay is an odd mix, but for Tecmo, hoping to appeal to a broader (U.S.) market, the premise offers a chance to bust out of its *Ninja Gaiden/Dead or Alive* mold. We've still to see it in action, but the concept art and gameplay theories are rock solid.

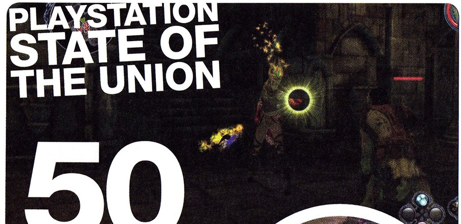
PUB: CODEMASTERS | **DEV:** TRIUMPH | **ETA:** 2009



49 OVERLORD II

New enemies, naval battles, and more realistic visuals make *Overlord II* look even better than the first game, which received positive plaudits from those game enough to give it a try. The sequel sees you fighting for supremacy in the Roman Empire, and has a more ambitious style that should attract greater PS3-fan awareness.

PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION



50

SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL

PUB: CDV | DEV: ASCARON
ETA: MID '09

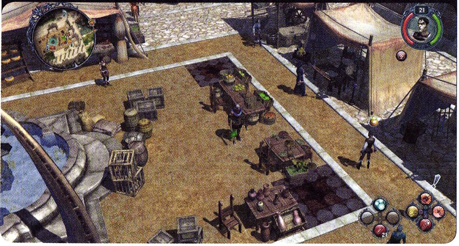
Twenty-two square miles and 200+ multi-level dungeons—all part of a free-roaming, no-load-time, open-from-the-start, day/night-cycled, high-fantasy world; it's welcome and long-awaited news from the Ancarian promised land for fans of the *Diablo*-esque experience, reconjured console-style.

Those who have followed *Sacred 2's* development thus far may already know about the backstory business of the Seraphim handing off all that ethereal, T-Energy know-how to the earthly High Elves down below. Yeah, well, turns out that wasn't such a good move after all. The genie is out of the bottle (or the trans-world pipeline, in this case).

Sacred 2 offers half a dozen (gender-locked) character class options—Inquisitor, Shadow Warrior, Dryad, Guardian, Seraphim and (per the abovementioned misallocation of resources) High Elf. As long as you're down with skimpy apparel or coiffure of less-than-likely hues, you're in business—but you're not here for the character customization.

As is so often the problem in life, you're obliged to choose the path/campaign of either light or shadow. Console venture or not, *Sacred 2* clings proudly to its PC roots, sporting a top-downish camera that can be optionally brought to nestle in an over-the-shoulder viewpoint (be a shame to waste some of those flank-revealing costumes). Each core path is estimated to clock in at 30-40 hours…but that's not reckoning with the 500-plus side-quests that threaten to push the game-time into triple digits for obsessive types.

With co-op sessions that can be continued after your worthless, connected so-called "friends" have left you to the mercy of some 80 enemy types, *Sacred 2* offers the heavenly promise of open-world, eye-pleasing, high fantasy adventure like mom used to make—provided, of course, that your mom was a writhing, malevolent, T-Energy-obsessed demon out to kill you (and your little mount, too!)



51

DARK VOID

PUB: CAPCOM |
DEV: AIRTIGHT GAMES |
ETA: FALL '09

At first glance its *Gears-of-War*-style running and shooting may seem familiar, but based on what we've played, its free-flying jetpack gameplay distinguishes it from every other third-person shooter out there. You control William Grey, a rakish everyman who takes an accidental spin into the Bermuda Triangle and finds himself on the run from laser-spewing aliens. Once there, you'll strap on a rocket pack that can fly circles around Boba Fett. The best part? You can use it at any time, hovering in place for precision strikes or screaming past enemies at top speed; no fuel constraints either, so you can fly as much or as little as you like. Throw in some huge boss battles, the ability to hijack enemy UFOs and a spiffy new "vertical cover" concept (where you duck under ledges as you ascend cliffs or towers) and there's more than enough newness to keep our eyes and ears interested. Expect a big push from Capcom this fall.

52

SABOTEUR

PUB: EA | DEV: PANDEMIC | ETA: '09

Set in occupied WWII France, third-person adventure *Saboteur* shares the same tech as Pandemic's *Mercenaries 2* but has a colorful "twist." In Nazi-controlled areas, the world will be grey and cloudy and its oppressed citizens will slump around. But free them from tyranny and the sun blooms, the streets fill with people, and accordion music rings sweetly in the air. You play as Irishman Shaun who uses his brawling expertise to drive the Nazis out of Paris. Historical accuracy: dubious. Potential: huge.

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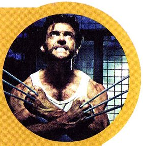

X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE

PUB: ACTIVISION |
DEV: RAVEN SOFTWARE | ETA: Q3

Based on the forthcoming movie of the same name, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* follows ol' Wolves before his skeleton was dip-coated in adamantium. During the '60s, he was working with an elite CIA outfit called Team X alongside Marvel mainstays Sabretooth and Silver Fox. The events lead up to Wolverine's kidnapping as he's forced into the Weapon X project and becomes the blade-wielding anti-hero we know and love. Devs Raven worked on PC hit *HeXen* (good) and *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* (not as good), so the jury's still out.

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PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION

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DEUS EX 3

DEV: EIDOS MONTREAL | PUB: EIDOS | ETA: '09

In the original *Deus Ex,* government agents had superhuman abilities thanks to discreet nanomachine "augmentations" implanted in their bodies, while people with visible, mechanical "augs" were seen as relics of an unsophisticated past. Well, go backwards 25 years to *Deus Ex 3*—a prequel—and mechanical "augs" are the height of technology. Agents use mechanical arms and cybernetic implants to fight terrorism as the human race evolves artificially at breakneck speed.

In the game you play as Adam Jensen, a private security officer for a firm that makes mechanical augs. While working there, he survives what seems like a terrorist attack and according to the devs, that's where "the conspiracy begins." Part of the first game's appeal was its dense, twisting plot. We can only hope the writing this time around is as sophisticated.

After the Xbox-only *Deus Ex 2: Invisible War* messed with the FPS/RPG formula of the first game to the point where it became a fan-alienating action game, Eidos Montreal wants to bring the series back to its roots, while still catering to a modern, mainstream audience by including the usual FPS staples like regenerating health. We've got high hopes for this one.

60

M.A.G.

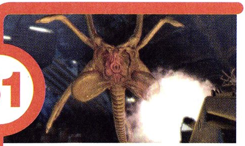
PUB: SCEA
DEV: ZIPPER INTERACTIVE | ETA: Q4

By using a new type of server, the *M.A.G. (Massive Action Game)* developers are able to support a staggering 256 players, with players sectioned into eight-man squads. The game will use an experience system similar to *Call of Duty,* we understand, and players with higher stats will become squad leaders. Vehicles will be at your disposal, and troops will be able to parachute into battle. The team that brought the past *SOCOM* games is on development duty, which aids our general enthusiasm. But it's still a massively ambitious premise.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

This past December, away from the prying eyes of most game industry journalists, Activision was enticing clients towards in-game advertising opportunities by revealing pieces of its upcoming catalogue. We have no details other than vague outlines, and assume they're all coming to PS3! What to expect? You can probably guess, but here goes: *Call of Duty: Modern Combat 2* **(55)**, *Guitar Hero 5* **(56)**, a new *Tony Hawk* game **(57)**. Plus, according to this presentation, recently purchased studio Bizarre Creations has a *new racer* **(58)** in the works (the studio is known for its *Project Gotham Racing* franchise, and *Geometry Wars,* all hits on that other platform) that should come to PS3. The same studio, according to the event, is also working on a new *James Bond* game **(59)** as a standalone release.

61

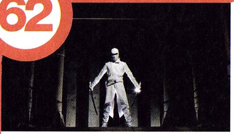


ALIENS COLONIAL MARINE

PUB: SEGA | **DEV:** GEARBOX | **ETA:** Q4

Sega's squad-based FPS lets you switch between four unique marines, with weapons that include the iconic pulse rifle, pistols, and RPGs. The story follows the events of *Alien 3* and is penned by the writers of the brilliant *Battlestar Galactica* TV series. You'll explore locations including Fiorina "Fury" 161 Prison (from *Alien 3)* and the marines' *U.S.S. Sulaco* (from *Aliens).* Tactical gun emplacements add a layer of strategy, not to mention twitchy face-hugger dodging.

62



G.I. JOE

PUB: EA | **DEV:** TBA | **ETA:** TBA

The big-budget summer movie stars Sienna Miller as The Baroness and Christopher Ecclestone (ex-Dr Who) as Destro. Operating in Brussels, GIJOE (Global Integrated Joint Operating Entity) is battling Cobra, an evil organization headed by a Scottish arms dealer. EA own the rights, and Variety reported a year ago of a game in the works, but few other details are known.

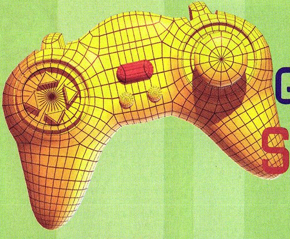
63

MERCHANT OF BROOKLYN

PUB: TBA | **DEV:** PALEO | **ETA:** 2009

Paleo's FPS uses the Cry-engine (used in the PC smash-hit *Crysis)* but the ability to pop a guy's eye out of its socket with your thumb steals the headlines. The "plot" sees you beating your way out of an illegal fighting ring in a post-apocalyptic New York City. You can literally punch a man's head in with your robot arm and charge up body parts as ad-hoc grenades.

FROM A LEADER IN GAME DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION



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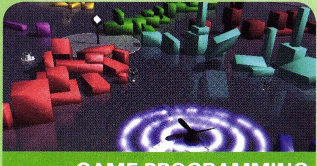
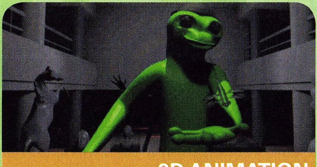
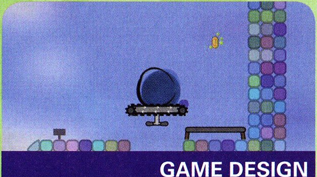


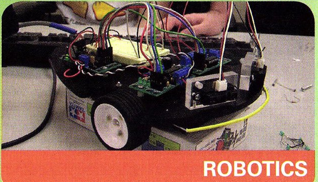
GAME PROGRAMMING



3D ANIMATION



GAME DESIGN



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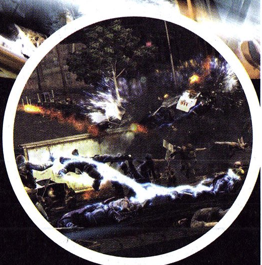
64

INFAMOUS

DEV: SUCKER PUNCH | PUB: SCEA | ETA: JUNE

Underneath the generic tough guy exterior, *Infamous'* lead character—the "hero" bit depends on you—Cole, is a complex beast. He'll not only rough up gangs of thugs with his electric-shock power but also make *GTA*-style moral decisions in a free-roaming Empire City. Do you head straight to the ticking bomb or help an injured woman en route? There are a myriad of ways for you to shape Cole as you decide whether you're going to be a do-gooder, earning respect from civilians who will help you in later situations, or head to the dark side in a trade-off for bigger and better powers. It's up to you.



SCEA is hyping *Infamous* as one of their big 2009 releases. *"GTA* with superpowers" is a good pitch, but it'll hinge on mission variety.

RUMOR MILL

65 - 75

Dead Rising 2 isn't Capcom's only big sequel, with *Lost Planet 2* **(65)** on the horizon in late 2009/early 2010 as a cross-platform release (hopefully they'll rectify the grainy snow from the original's lackluster PS3 port). After switching to U.S. developer The Collective for *Silent Hill: Homecoming,* Konami is rumored to be re-uniting the Japanese Team Silent for a return in *Silent Hill 6* **(66)**. Another of Konami's big pushes will be *Lords of Shadow* **(67)** by Madrid-based studio Mercury Steam, a *Castlevania* meets *Pan's Labyrinth* third-person action adventure due in 2010. An early trailer shows a Hugh Jackman look-alike praying before being interrupted by a 100-foot ogre which the knight promptly dispatches with a flaming whip/crucifix weapon. The game's due for a swishy unveiling event next year. We expect Hideo Kojima to announce his new project(s) around April or May, with *MGS5* **(68)** also certain to be confirmed; not a direct Kojima production, but he'll be involved in some capacity. Sensible speculation points to a Raiden-starring prequel, explaining how he became Ninja and rescued Sunny from The Patriots, or a Mercenaries-style team-based online shooter starring Meryl and the FOXHOUND team. Kojima's own new game **(69)** might have something to do with Max Savage—based on a hidden dream sequence in *MGS3,* where Big Boss imagines he's a blade-swinging character fighting monsters. It'd be better than a new *Boktai,* at least. At a recent UK press conference, Atari (and ex-Sony) honcho Phil Harrison confirmed they'd be returning to the *Test Drive Unlimited* **(70)**, *Neverwinter Nights* **(71)**, *Baldur's Gate* **(72)**, and *Dungeons & Dragons* **(73)** franchises, but not for at least another year. We're making bold assumptions that each game will hit multiple platforms, including our PS3. Naughty Dog is likely preparing another announcement too, almost certain to be *Jak and Daxter 4* **(74)**. Sega owns the extended rights to the *Aliens* universe, including spin-offs, so you can guess which *Battle of the Monsters* **(75)** is on the cards.

WE MAY NEVER PLAY

76 WET

PUB: TBA | **DEV:** A2M

This *Total Overdose* meets *Tomb Raider* action game was lost during the fall of Vivendi. It was so close to completion that it wasn't cancelled outright, but we're unsure if any publishers will pick it up. Shame, because it looked like it had potential.

77 HEI$T

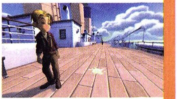
PUB: CODEMASTERS | **DEV:** INXILE ENT

This game of cops, robbers, and bank heists was scheduled for release this year, but hasn't surfaced—and possibly never will. The team behind it, InXile Entertainment, was formed by one of the creators of the *Fallout* series.

78 HIGHLANDER

PUB: EIDOS | **DEV:** WIDESCREEN GAMES

With levels set across multiple time periods including ancient Rome and modern-day New York, this showed real promise. But Eidos has been tight-lipped about it lately and it seems doomed to lose its head.



79 LEISURE SUIT LARRY

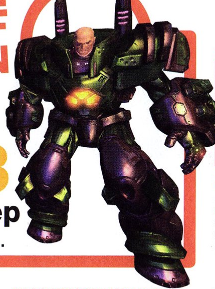
PUB: TBA | **DEV:** TEAM 17

Another victim of the Activision/Blizzard merger, Larry's smutty exploits on a movie set probably won't get a release. We're not sure whether to be happy or sad about that. Maybe time has moved on from finding his exploits amusing.

PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION

80-93

You can't keep
A Good List Down…



PUB: SQUARE ENIX | DEV: SQUARE ENIX | ETA: '10

80 FINAL FANTASY XIII

Given the high quality of the previous *Final Fantasy* games it's unlikely this is going to disappoint; expect lush visuals, deep gameplay and the usual dramatic plotlines. Find out where you can get more details on each leaked nugget of info on page 15.

PUB: SQUARE ENIX | DEV: SQUARE ENIX | ETA: '09

81 FINAL FANTASY VERSUS XIII

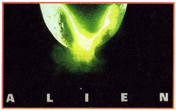
This dark action adventure is set in the same universe as *Final Fantasy XIII* and will apparently feature real-time combat similar to that featured in *Kingdom Hearts.* We've also heard rumblings this PS3 exclusive may hit before *FF XIII.*

PUB: SEGA | DEV: SEGA | ETA: LATE '09

82 YAKUZA 3

This is a true sequel to the PS2 time sink. Already-released screenshots look spectacular (and show off your schmoozing with "hostesses") and you can even record fights on a mobile phone to learn the moves for later fights. We hope the English translation arrives soon after the Japanese release.

PUB: SEGA | DEV: OBSIDIAN | ETA: LATE '09



83 ALIENS RPG

Coded by Obsidian Entertainment (makers of *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic 2),* we expect this to use the same core engine and game mechanics. Expect a mix of semi-real-time combat, exploration, and a branching plot determined by your in-game actions.

PUB: KOEI | DEV: OMEGA FORCE | ETA: Q3

84 DYNASTY WARRIORS 6: EMPIRES

Koei throw open the doors to another battlefield of buttonmashing action. Details are thin on the ground but expect more extravagant Musou attacks and less fog. We kinda figured another *DW* game was in the works…no clue what gave us that idea!

PUB: BETHESDA | DEV: ZOMBIE | ETA: FALL

85 ROGUE WARRIOR

A shooter set in the conflict between North and South Korea, *Rogue Warrior* relies on tactical combat and features advanced AI, which means that enemies fight as a team. It will feature over 200 multiplayer maps (thanks to a system that lets both teams choose tiles right before a match, which then determines the map…yes, we'd like more details) and up to four can play the main campaign in co-op.

PUB: KONAMI | DEV: KCET | ETA: SEPT/OCT

86 PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010

Officially playing catch up to *FIFA 09* after being outsold nearly 2:1, and critically outscored, Konami needs to rework the visuals, ditch the hokum CGI intros, drop the reality-shattering PES points, revamp Master League with real-world licenses, and, reboot the commentary system, and—above all—make it work online.

PUB: ACTIVISION | DEV: FREESTYLE | ETA: 2009

87 DJ HERO

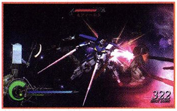
Developed in the UK by FreeStyle Games, an independent studio recently acquired by Activision. it'll come with a set of plastic decks with faders and sample buttons, and you can even duel with another player using a *Guitar Hero* guitar. Walk This Way by Aerosmith and Run DMC, anyone? They do have the license for it from *GH: Aerosmith* after all.

PUB: CODEMASTERS | DEV: BLUE OMEGA | ETA: '09

88 DAMNATION

This has a lot going for it—massive environments, intense shooting, and vertigo-inducing platforming. Expanded from an *Unreal Tournament* mod into a fully developed release, it has a distinct style could help give it an edge among some higher profile action releases on shelves at the same time.

PUB: KOEI | DEV: KOEI/OMEGA FORCE | ETA: APR



89 DYNASTY WARRIORS: GUNDAM 2

This second *Gundam* looks much the same as the previous one: giant robots beating the bejeebus out of each other. This time, out in the far reaches of space! Already released in its native Japan, this sequel is on store shelves very soon.

PUB/DEV: CODEMASTERS | ETA: LATE '09

90 CODEMASTERS F1 GAME

This doesn't have a name yet, but the involvement of members of the *GRID* team provides instant credibility. Formula 1 has yet to catch on in the U.S. the way it has so spectacularly in Europe (and Japan), but another high-quality sim could help awareness Stateside.

PUB: SOE | DEV: SOE AUSTIN | ETA: LATE '09

91 DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

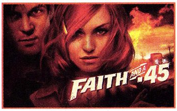
Massively multiplayer online gaming on the PS3 has a figurehead, and its name is *DCUO.* The comic book series is coming to life, and looking more impressive with each showing. You'll help (or hinder) Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and many more classic characters as you build your own heroic legacy in the perpetual world.

PUB: ACTIVISION | DEV: LUXOFLUX | ETA: LATE '09

92 TRANSFORMERS 2: THE GAME

Finally getting to play as Optimus Prime was a decidedly underwhelming experience. We hope this second go-around, to support the upcoming sure-thing blockbuster movie, learns a few new tricks. Like parading video of Megan Fox doing...anything for a few minutes. Just a thought.

PUB: TBA | DEV: DEADLINE GAMES | ETA: 2009



93 FAITH AND A .45

This action game is from the makers of *Total Overdose* and revolves around a Bonnie-and-Clyde–style couple thieving their way through Great Depression-era America. The lack of a publisher at this point raises questions over if and when it might ever see the light of day.

PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION

94-107

Really, this many?

And plenty more to come...

PUB: D3 | **DEV:** VICIOUS CYCLE | **ETA:** SPRING

94 EAT LEAD: RETURN OF MATT HAZARD

Ironic that a parody of generic action games should itself have the potential to be a generic action game. The concept of a washed-up videogame hero is great, and we love the casting of Will Arnett and Neil Patrick Harris. We hope the gameplay matches the promise.

PUB: SEGA | **DEV:** SEGA | **ETA:** 2010

95 IRON MAN 2

Sure, we're stoked about a sequel to one of the best superhero movies we've seen. But a sequel to the disappointing game? Hmm. Let's face it; the original game was not at home when Mr. and Mrs. Goodgame Design came knocking. We can only hope it moves into the neighborhood this time around.

PUB: 2K GAMES | **DEV:** GEARBOX | **ETA:** LATE '09

96 BORDERLANDS

It's hard to know what to expect now from this shooter that was announced with great fanfare only to disappear into some developmental abyss. Gearbox has an impressive pedigree, the big action premise (with hundreds of thousands of possible gun combinations) is intriguing, but we'll have to wait for more details to emerge.

PUB: MIDWAY GAMES | **DEV:** MIDWAY NEWCASTLE | **ETA:** 2009

97 WHEELMAN

Vin Diesel's racer/action game lets you tear around Barcelona, Spain in a range of vehicles, from massive trucks to nippy motorbikes. Not the most original premise but the shiny visuals and non-stop action definitely has appeal. Its release plan is currently unclear given publisher Midway's ongoing tribulations.

PUB: UBISOFT | **DEV:** SWORDFISH | **ETA:** Q2

98 WORLD IN CONFLICT: SOVIET ASSAULT

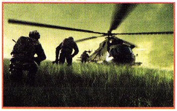
Set in an alternative 1989—where the Soviets have invaded the U.S.—the PS3 version of this real-time strategy game will feature exclusive new missions, maps, and cutscenes. It illustrates another effort to make sure the genre succeeds on the console, which is absolutely fine by us.

PUB: EA | **DEV:** BRIGHT LIGHT | **ETA:** Q3

99 HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE

The last game was decent, so we've raised our expectations for this new movie tie-in. It follows the plot familiar to the legion of fans, and will release alongside the movie adaptation later in the year. Plus, online multiplayer modes are already confirmed.

PUB: CODEMASTERS | **DEV:** CODEMASTERS STUDIOS | **ETA:** LATE '09



100 OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2: DRAGON RISING

Everything about Codemasters' military shooter screams realism—from gritty visuals and unscripted missions with multiple paths to photo-realistic guns. The original PC release fought for market share with *Ghost Recon,* with many loving *OF's* inclusion of vehicles. We have very, very high hopes.

PUB: SEGA | **DEV:** OBSIDIAN | **ETA:** Q4

101 ALPHA PROTOCOL

We put this intriguing spy-themed action game on the cover (PTOM Holiday issue) for a reason. The development studio has a good track record, the concept is compelling, and now it's all about the execution. As agent Michael Thornton, the decisions you make will impact the world around you in significant ways, adding moral and philosophical conundrums to the gameplay.

PUB: EA | **DEV:** ID SOFTWARE | **ETA:** 2010

102 RAGE

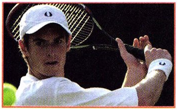
This first-person shooter from legendary studio id Software is part shooter, part *MotorStorm*-style off-road racer. It's set in a future where an asteroid impact has turned Earth into a giant desert. It will also use the very latest, greatest John Carmack-crafted graphics technology, so expect a spectacular graphical presentation.

PUB: UBISOFT | **DEV:** UBISOFT BUCHAREST | **ETA:** MARCH

103 TOM CLANCY'S HAWX

Absolutely nothing to do with ornithology, this Tom Clancy flight sim combat game is set in the same near-future as *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter.* Strapped into the cockpit of a modern military fighter (from a selection of 50 real-world aircraft), you'll have to force yourself to ignore the photo-realistic scenery while you battle for air supremacy.

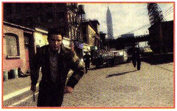
PUB: EA SPORTS | **DEV:** EA SPORTS | **ETA:** LATE '09



104 EA TENNIS

Absolutely no details have so far been released on how EA plans to make its mark in the tennis game field, but we can make a few assumptions: it'll star every major player you could possibly wish for, it'll have a sim-like look and feel, with arcade friendly gameplay functions for the kids, and it'll have a huge online tournament schedule. Or else.

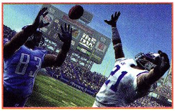
PUB: 2K GAMES | **DEV:** 2K CZECH | **ETA:** FALL



105 MAFIA 2

We got behind this gem-in-the-making back in our May '08 issue because it truly has the potential to challenge the critical plaudits lauded on *GTA IV.* The original *Mafia* suffered technical and gameplay problems, undermining a terrific story progression. With the technical aspects addressed, it's an open-world action game with bags of potential.

PUB: EA SPORTS | **DEV:** EA TIBURON | **ETA:** AUGUST



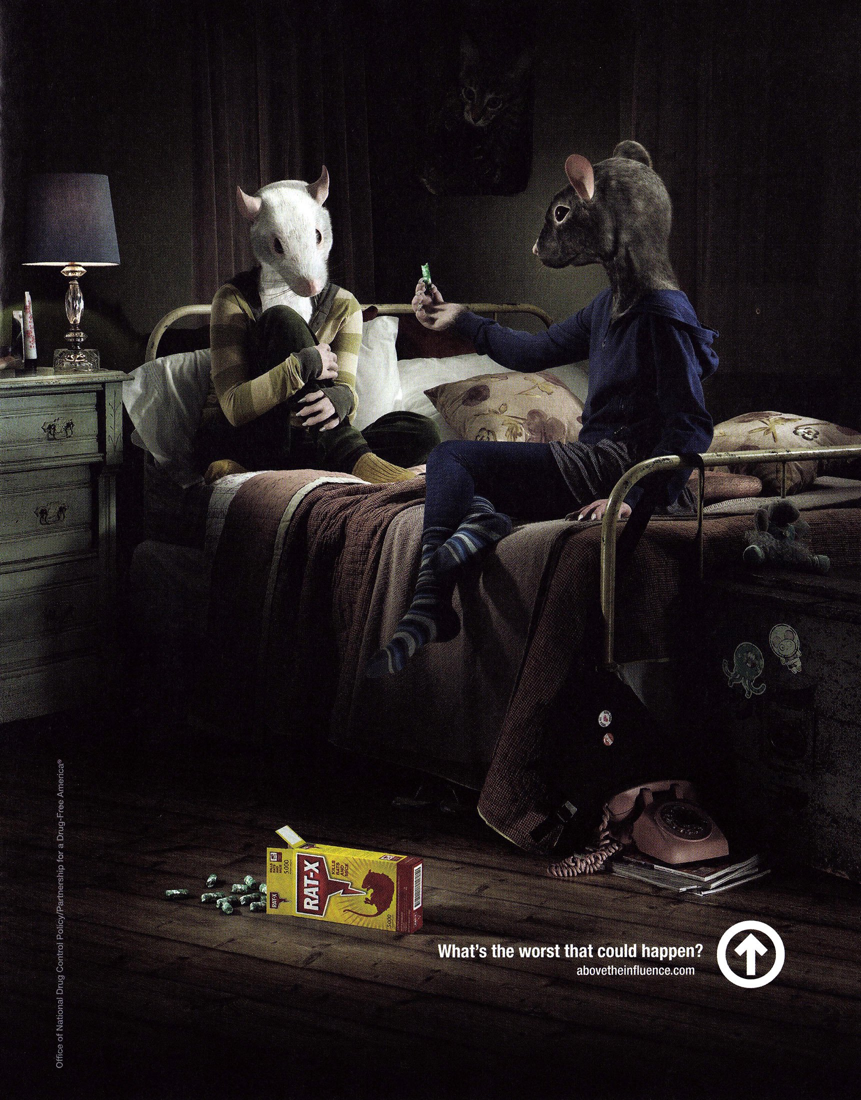
106 MADDEN NFL 10

For this inevitable sequel, the Madden fanbase is requesting better quarterback AI, cleaner menus, and a new franchise mode with more realistic player development. After all the critical acclaim for *Madden 09* we just hope the dev team doesn't rest on its only-game-in-town laurels.

PUB: SCEA | **DEV:** SEED STUDIOS | **ETA:** LATE '09

107 UNDER SIEGE

So little is known about this game, but it has us intrigued. Why? Because it's a planned PS3 exclusive, it's being developed in Portugal (who'll volunteer for that studio visit?), and it's a real-time strategy game, complete with its own level editor. That's more than enough to pique our interest.


RAT-X
KILLS RATS AND MICE
5,000
What's the worst that could happen?
abovetheinfluence.com

Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug-Free America®

PLAYSTATION NETWORK

Enjoy deeper, more involved and compelling game experiences for the budget-conscious gamer as downloads from the PlayStation Store.

WATCHMEN: THE END IS NIGH

PUB: WARNER BROTHERS | **DEV:** DEADLINE GAMES | **ETA:** MARCH

108

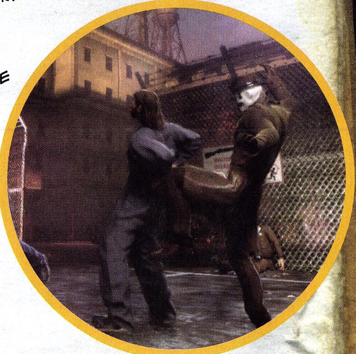
RORSCHACH'S JOURNAL. AUGUST 21, 1970.

RIOT AT SING SING TODAY. UNDERBOSS ESCAPED. POWER CUT FROM THE OUTSIDE, MUST HAVE HAD HELP. USED RIOT TO COVER IT. SMART. SMARTER THAN I REMEMBER.

TOOK HIM DOWN WITH DREIBERG IN '65. HAVE TO TAKE HIM DOWN AGAIN. NO ONE ELSE GOT OUT TODAY. INSIDE JOB?

GUARDS WERE NO HELP. COWARDS. NOT MUCH BETTER THAN SCUM THEY BABYSIT. FOUGHT OUR WAY TO BACKUP GENERATORS.

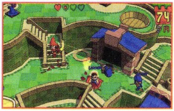
FISTS AGAINST RAW SKIN, DULL THUDS LIKE POUNDING MEAT. FELT GOOD. HAPPY TO GIVE SCUM WHAT IT DESERVES.



WARDEN THREATENED US, RIGHTEOUS BEHIND HIS CIRCUS OF MURDERERS AND DEGENERATES. ONLY DOING WHAT HAS TO BE DONE. NO COMPROMISE.

HEADING TO RUMRUNNER NOW. HAPPY HARRY'S CLOSED. NEED TO FIND OUT WHO HELPED UNDERBOSS. SOMEONE THERE WILL KNOW.

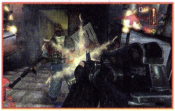
PUB: SCEA | **DEV:** TITAN STUDIOS | **ETA:** SPRING



109 FAT PRINCESS

Easily one of the most exciting pieces of PSN's 2009 line-up is this colorful playground of blood and guts. *Fat Princess* is a 32-player battle royale where you have to protect your flag (read: plump monarch) from being carted off to the enemy base to score a point. You do this by hacking your way through the opposition with swords, arrows, and magic spells, repairing/destroying bridges and by force-feeding food to your princess so she's too heavy for the opposing army to carry. Several class types include archers, wizards, builders, medics, and warriors. It's quirky, intriguing, and could be a standout for PS3 in 2009.

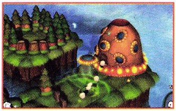
PUB: TBA | **DEV:** ZEN STUDIOS | **ETA:** SUMMER



110 THE PUNISHER: NO MERCY

This might be based on the comic book series but don't expect a narrative to match. It's a straight multiplayer online game featuring capture the flag, territories, and deathmatch modes. You'll be able to level up your weaponry, which ranges from standard issue shotguns and pistols to hot killing machines. It's not clear at this point how Frank Castle, his friends, and arch-enemies factor into this gameplay dynamic, but we don't have long to wait.

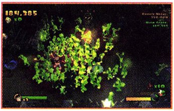
PUB: CAPCOM | **DEV:** CAPCOM | **ETA:** SPRING



111 FLOCK

When aliens aren't gang-probing country yokels, they're happy to get involved in local agriculture. You control a small UFO that has to lead livestock into the waiting Mother Flocker Ship. You herd sheep, pigs, cows, and chickens using your tractor-beam to manipulate items like uprooting trees and smashing fences to clear a path. More fun than it sounds!

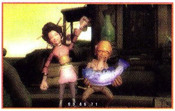
PUB: PINNACLE | **DEV:** DOUBLESIX | **ETA:** 2009



112 BURN ZOMBIE BURN

As the title suggests you're going to be flaming a whole load of undead folk in this top-down shooter. Your task is to off as many as possible while chaining together combos with mini-guns, grenades, and bits of burning wood. Of course, tons of zombie types require a bit of strategerizing within the action.

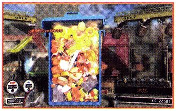
PUB: SCEA | **DEV:** TARSIER | **ETA:** MARCH



113 RAG DOLL KUNG FU: FIST OF PLASTIC

The brainchild of *LittleBigPlanet* creators Media Molecule, but they handed the reins to a less-busy studio. It's like when you made your GI Joe figure fight with your He-Man as the characters defy gravity and whack each other with various martial arts weapons. You can build up special moves that are activated with a shake of the Sixaxis, and can create a character for use in online battles.

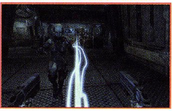
PUB: SCEA | **DEV:** SCEJ | **ETA:** TBA



114 GOMIBAKO

It means "trash can" in Japanese and sees you organizing bits of garbage into a giant bin. You'll dispose of tons of household objects like rocking horses, toilets, and mattresses by moving and dropping them, much like *Tetris*. The hook is that you can set the items alight, smash wood with heavier stuff to break into smaller bits, or flood the bin with toilet juice to rot away paper!

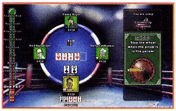
PUB: UBISOFT | **DEV:** IMMERSION | **ETA:** 2009



115 CELLFACTOR: PSYCHOKINETIC WARS

An all-out first-person deathmatch with a heaping dose of psychic trashing, and high-tech aesthetics. The focus is on multiplayer combat with three characters to choose from. Bishop (the fembot) relies solely on psychic power; Guardian is a big metal brute; Black-Op balances psychic and firepower. Pick your favorite, and get to war.

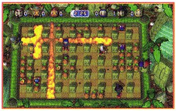
PUB: D3PUBLISHER | **DEV:** WIDELOAD GAMES | **ETA:** SPRING



116 TEXAS CHEAT 'EM

Classic Texas Hold 'Em (the poker variant popularized by the explosion of interest in the World Series of Poker), but for cheaters! Mini-games include a variety of other gambling games (with fake currency, of course). Simple and accessible is the goal in this well-designed collection.

PUB: HUDSON | **DEV:** HUDSON | **ETA:** SPRING

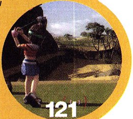


117 BOMBERMAN ULTRA

Arguably one of the greatest, most playable and accessible multiplayer games of all-time, its arrival on PSN could seriously impact our ability to ship PTOM on time. Seriously addictive, and now with customizable game types and characters, we dread (but can't wait) for this release.

THIS SPORTING LIFE

Several of the annually iterated sports games are factored elsewhere in this guide, but we couldn't forget *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10* **(118)** no doubt adding a couple new courses, *NBA Live 10* **(119)**, which needs to build on the '09 release to catch-up to the *NBA 2K*-series, and *NCAA Football 10* **(120)**, which we hope forgets about the bands/mascots and continues to improve the career progression. And we'd be remiss not to mention *Hot Shots Golf 6* **(121)** though it's still unconfirmed.

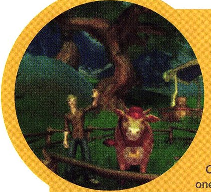


121

SILVER SCREEN CERTAINTY

The implosion of publisher Brash Entertainment—which had set a mandate to produce quality games based on popular movie licenses (and then failed to deliver)—means this section is a little leaner than it could have been. However, shortly before press time, Konami announced that it had picked up the rights to the *Saw* **(122)** movie franchise, which is curious given its *Silent Hill* commitment in the horror genre. Dreamwork's impressive animated feature *Monsters vs. Aliens* **(123)** has a game in the works that Activision will publish. The game version of Pixar's animated movie *Up* **(124)** will be released through THQ. And as if the kids needed more, *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs* **(125)** will also have a game released that we expect to see on PS3. Of greater interest to older gamers is that despite culling jobs and projects, we should still see *TRON 2* (aka *TR2N)* **(126)** from Disney Interactive. No word if Monolith will resume development duties. Also worth mentioning is the fact that *The Godfather II* **(127)** has been delayed until what publisher EA described as "fiscal year 2010," which means later this year. And we'll wrap up with the really positive expectation we have around developer GRIN's *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* **(128)**, being published by Warner Brothers Interactive. The bullet-curving play mechanic and scripted event interactive stunt moments could combine into one of those rare moments when a movie-licensed game works on a qualitive level.

127



129

FREE REALMS

PUB: SOE | DEV: SOE
ETA: LATE '09

Another massively multiplayer game from Sony Online Entertainment, but this one is targeted straight at the younger gamer set. Its colorful art style, initial free-to-play entry requirement, and social networking functions peg it as a first rung on the MMO ladder. It will be playable on PC, but a PS3 version is promised where you'll explore environments, meet other players, collect objects, and then possibly engage in a little combat. Neat and sweet, it appears to round out SOE's extensive MMO plans on the PS3.

POSTAL
RUNNING WITH SCISSORS

130

POSTAL 3

PUB: TBD |
DEV: RUNNING WITH SCISSORS |
ETA: LATE '09

It is a fact that the third game in the controversial series is in the works. It isn't confirmed, but we have excellent sources that suggest it will appear on PS3. What this "nobody loves us but we don't care" developer gets up to with its gloriously irreverent attitude blended with HD graphics is anyone's guess. But you can guarantee we'll be watching.

singstar
QUEEN

131

SINGSTAR QUEEN

PUB: SCEA | DEV: SCE LONDON | ETA: Q3

OMG! OMG! OMG! OMG! Old folks (like Rob), who can't and won't sing a lick (outside the privacy of their own shower) are stoked at this release in the evolving *SingStar* franchise. Even if your association with the band only goes so far as to belt out its stadium-style hits, this one should get the crowds going at parties. The complete song list of the intial release leaves enough room for later downloadable content since it omits Seven Seas of Rye, for example.

PUB: TBD | **DEV:** EAT SLEEP PLAY | **ETA:** LATE '09

EAT SLEEP PLAY

132 TWISTED METAL

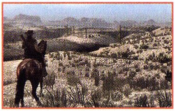
Rumor and suggestion, maybe, but it's enough to make us confident that original *Twisted Metal* creator David Jaffe is really, truly working on the game. Of course, its unconfirmed status means that we really have no idea what to expect, but like you, we can't wait for the first opportunity to see what a next-generation translation of the classic series can deliver.

PUB: EA | **DEV:** SLIGHTLY MAD | **ETA:** Q3

134 NEED FOR SPEED SHIFT

Several principles of this new developer have credits on the impressive PC sims *GT Legends* and *GTR 2.* That alone is an interesting detail behind the announcement of yet another *NFS* game. Since *Undercover* underperformed, this latest release needs to showcase new ideas and mechanics to win back an audience that has treated the franchise with a collective *meh.*

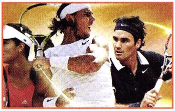
PUB: ROCKSTAR | **DEV:** ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO | **ETA:** LATE '09



136 RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Westerns are some kind of gaming Holy Grail. Message board posters insist that the genre is ripe for gaming, yet it's so rarely been effectively exploited *(Outlaws?)* So Rockstar is returning to its *Red Dead Revolver* roots with a sequel bound to earn extra awareness given its developer's impressive background.

PUB: SEGA | **DEV:** SEGA | **ETA:** MAY



138 VIRTUA TENNIS 2009

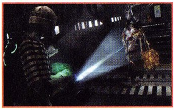
A classic returns, and we couldn't be happier. So long as the tried and true gameplay mechanics remain, we're pretty confident that this is a franchise it's impossible to screw up. All the stars you could want to play will feature, including Nadal, Federer, Andy Murray, and Maria Sharapova.

PUB: SCEA | **DEV:** LEVEL-5 | **ETA:** 2009

133 WHITE KNIGHT CHRONICLES

The dearth of PS3 RPGs of any origin made us assume that the translation of this Japanese-focused game would occur sooner rather than later. It's already out in Japan, and it looks absolutely sensational, with art stylings rivaling Square's *FF XIII*. No doubt the volume of text and voice-over translation will take a while, but we're sure it'll land…eventually.

PUB: EA | **DEV:** EA | **ETA:** LATE '09



135 DEAD SPACE 2

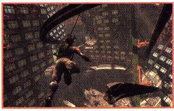
We're pleased to hear that EA is not straight ditching the new survival-in-space franchise that we understand barely scraped towards internal sales expectations. It deserves another chance both to expand on the impressive story, and capture gamers' attention (hopefully in better economic times).

PUB: EA | **DEV:** DICE | **ETA:** LATE '09

137 BATTLEFIELD 1943

Before going modern, *Battlefield* was the WWII action game that broke new ground for multiplayer gaming. Original developers DICE are taking a trip back to the era with on-foot, in-vehicle (including planes) combat across Wake Island, Guadalcanal, and Iwo Jima in 24-player shootouts that will be downloadable through PSN.

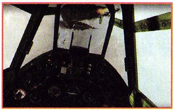
PUB: CAPCOM | **DEV:** CAPCOM | **ETA:** Q3



139 BIONIC COMMANDO

Early play-tests indicated that the control mechanics of this reimagining could hamstring the entire experience. We've been more hopeful after more recent outings, but concerns remain that this is one of those fondly remembered games that may have been better left to a rose-tinted memory.

PUB: 505 GAMES/1C | **DEV:** GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT | **ETA:** LATE '09



140 IL-2 STURMOVIK: BIRDS OF PREY

It's funny how a truly hardcore (but critically acclaimed) old school PC-only flight simulator can be transformed for modern consoles. Expanding beyond the Eastern Front with this release, you'll be able to fly in some 50 historical missions, all themed within the most famous aerial battles of WWII. That means the Battle of Britain for sure, alongside the sieges of Stalingrad and Berlin.

PUB: ATARI | **DEV:** CD PROJEKT RED | **ETA:** Q3

142 THE WITCHER: RISE OF THE WHITE WOLF

PC gamers have already played a version of this action-RPG that's based on the universe crafted in Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski's books. So you play Geralt, a monster slayer, and you not surprisingly slay monsters, but it all takes place in a world riddled with striking complexities that add crazy considerations to the general hack-slash-and-loot-gathering mechanics you might expect.

PUB: SCEE | **DEV:** SCE LONDON | **ETA:** LATE '09

EyePet
Your Virtual Pet

144 EYEPET

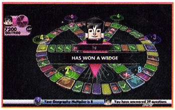
The potential of utilizing the PS Eye into gameplay has yet to be scratched, despite the push of the stylish *Eye of Judgment*. But finding options within the well-worn path of *Tamagochi*-like pet care seems like a no-brainer, and that's what we expect from this project coming out of Sony's European studio later in the year.

PUB: SOUTHPEAK GAMES | **DEV:** TIMEGATE STUDIOS | **ETA:** Q3

141 SECTION 8

A futuristic squad of soldiers assembled only to take on suicide missions provides the apt title of this new all-out shooter. Your powered-armor infantry are able to modify the battlefield, adding a strategic element to the other-worldly shooter action.

PUB: EA | **DEV:** EA | **ETA:** SPRING



143 TRIVIAL PURSUIT

Does this need explaining? EA's deal with Hasbro resulted in the pretty well conceived *Family Game Night*, and so we expect a similarly respectful and functional reproduction of the classic trivia game on PS3. The potential for downloadable question packs could provide legs way beyond those you might expect for a simple quiz game.

ON THE PERIPHERY

Several PS3 games currently in development on PS3 may only get a release in Japan, though increased globalization could result in more than we suspect hitting shelves Stateside. Whatever the case, some of these are particularly obscure, but hey, what's a list like this for if not to entice with the promise of what developers might concoct? So consider *X-Edge* (also known as *Cross-Edge*) **(145)** from NIS, the company that keeps bringing the *Disgaea* games and even *Ar tonelico* to the U.S. Apparently, the game includes characters from *Darkstalkers, Spectral Souls*, and *Mana Khemia*, as well as the aforementioned stalwarts. And publisher PlayLogic has a game called *Fairytale Fights* **(146)** in the works, and it's a truly fascinating premise—take the cute, cuddly, and oh-so righteous characters from culture-crossing fairytales and have them smack the snot out of each other in a beat-'em-up showcase. That's more information than we can offer about Namco's *Invincible Tiger* **(147)** or 505 Games' *ArmA II* **(148)** though we understand it's to be developed by Bohemia Interactive.

145

PUB: TBD | **DEV:** CRYTEK UK | **ETA:** TBD

TimeSplitters

149 TIMESPLITTERS 4

What to make of this one? Developer Free Radical was allegedly working on the latest iteration of its popular FPS franchise when it went belly-up, only to be rescued by Crytek. Curiously, the studio's 40-some remaining staffers were retained in the buy-out, and that gives us hope that whatever work was done on this game will continue, now with the added bonus of being able to call on Crytek's technology.

150

WOLFENSTEIN

PUB: ACTIVISION | DEV: ID SOFTWARE | ETA: FALL

Split between the "real" world—1940s Europe—and a supernatural realm, this is part *Medal Of Honor,* part weird-war-levels from *The Darkness.* Set in the town of Isenstadt, you'll visit the Otherworld, where in-game the world is tinted blue, indicating your increased powers, including slowing time and even allowing you to see weak points in powerful enemies. The Wolfenstein series is famed for its quality class-based online multiplayer, and this will return in its first PS3 outing with a range of vintage and supernatural weapons. It's been a while since B.J. Blazkowicz's last adventure, and we love id's trademark brand of WWII themes and horror.

THEIR WORLD, HIS RULES

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Strong Language
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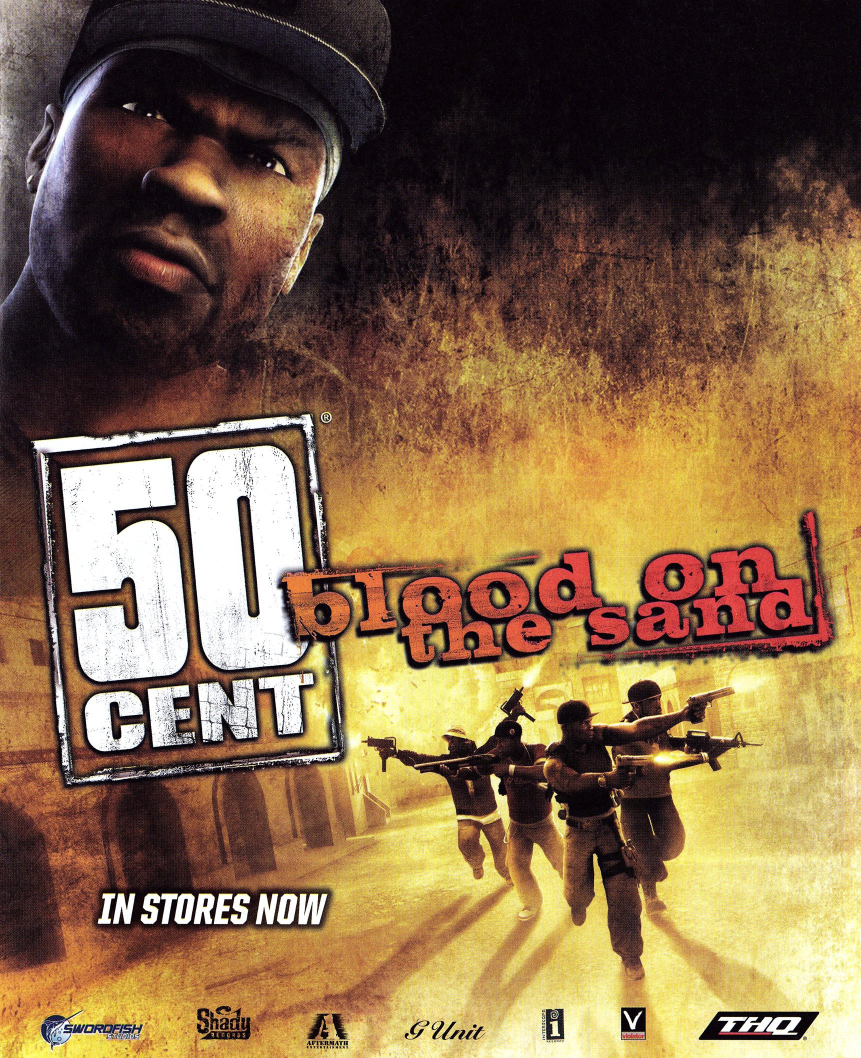
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Hands-on Preview

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: April

GENRE: Action/First-person Shooter

PUBLISHER: Atari

DEVELOPER: Tigon Studios/Starbreeze Studios

CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK:

When it comes to the *Riddick* games, Vin Diesel is more than a face and a voice; he's an active part of the overall creation process. And lucky for us, we had a chance to ask him about it...

WATCHING FROM THE SHADOWS

By Scott Butterworth

RIDDICK. The name's familiar, right? Shades. Gruff voice. Poor critical reception to the movies. So a number of key facts about the upcoming game deserve recognition: It's based on a sci-fi movie franchise that stars Vin Diesel; it's more or less a first-person shooter injected with stealth and melee combat; and it's a sequel to the somewhat surprisingly well-received *Escape From Butcher Bay* which appeared exclusively on the original Xbox back in 2004. But that's not how it started...

ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

Hand-to-hand combat plays a prominent role in the game, and Riddick's melee attacks can be brutal, especially when Ulaks (see left inset) are involved.

» "When we announced the game originally, it was really just some added content, and the focus of the project was very much about remaking *Escape from Butcher Bay* for next-gen," explains Ian Stevens, Head of Game Production at Vin Diesel-owned Tigon Studios. "But throughout the course of all the [corporate negotiations], that additional content turned into a whole new game."

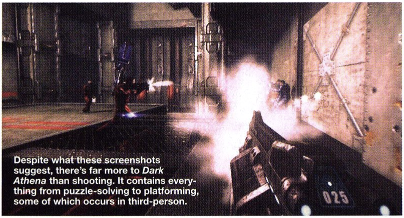
So is *Assault on Dark Athena* a full sequel? Absolutely. But the disc will also contain a fully upgraded version of *Escape from Butcher Bay.* "We went back to that original game and recreated everything. So every character model got redone, every bit of texture in that game got redone, we uncompressed all of our animation data, anything that we did with our AI technology for *Assault on Dark Athena* is sort of retroactively a part of that old game… Pretty much everything we're doing now has become a part of that remake technically as well," details Stevens.

The developers also responded to community feedback to fine-tune and make more intuitive some of the game's more frustrating and problematic sections. According to Stevens, "I think anyone who's played that game once or twice already, and they're a fan, [the remake] is going to feel like a huge love letter to them because we really did treat it so carefully and did so much work to it."

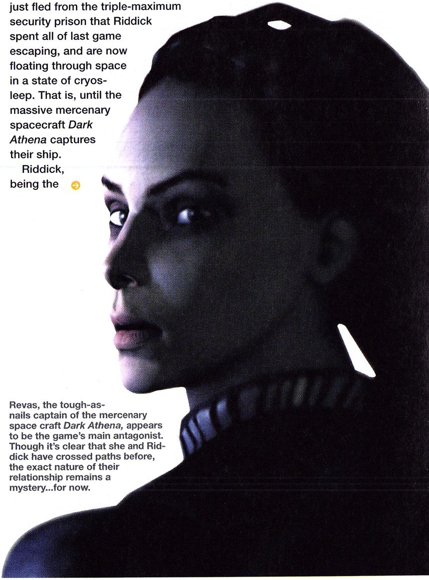
PAINT IT BLACK

Unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to see the reinvented *Butcher Bay* up and running on PS3, but I did play through the first hour of *Assault on Dark Athena.* The story picks up exactly where the previous game left off: dangerous criminal Richard Riddick and bounty hunter William Johns have just fled from the triple-maximum security prison that Riddick spent all of last game escaping, and are now floating through space in a state of cryosleep. That is, until the massive mercenary spacecraft *Dark Athena* captures their ship.

Riddick, being the



Despite what these screenshots suggest, there's far more to *Dark Athena* than shooting. It contains everything from puzzle-solving to platforming, some of which occurs in third-person.



Revas, the tough-as-nails captain of the mercenary space craft *Dark Athena,* appears to be the game's main antagonist. Though it's clear that she and Riddick have crossed paths before, the exact nature of their relationship remains a mystery...for now.

With metallic corridors, inexplicable blinking lights, *Star Trek*-style automatic doors, and wall-mounted health pods, the environments in *Dark Athena* draw on all sorts of sci-fi staples.

DIESEL POWERED

Vin Diesel is many things: a movie star, a gentleman, a badass. But did you know he's also a passionate gamer? It's true. His role in the Riddick franchise extends far beyond mere voice actor. In fact, he actually founded and still currently owns Tigon Studios, which is partnered with Starbreeze Studios to develop all Riddick-related content. We recently had a chance to chat with Vin about the upcoming *Assault on Dark Athena,* and it didn't take much to get him talking. Here's what he had to say about all things Riddick:

▶ Actor. Gamer. Developer. Vin Diesel is a modern Renaissance man.

So what did you and Tigon set out to accomplish with *Dark Athena?* Why not just create a traditional sequel?

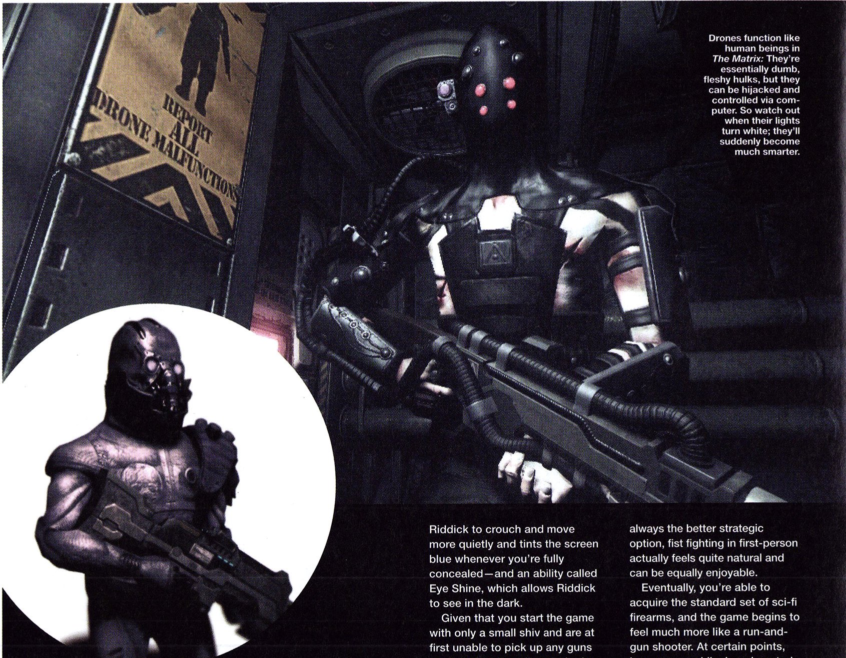
Vin Diesel: The first objective here was to make this experience available to everybody on the PS3 and allow this game to be experienced on multiple platforms and multiple consoles. Why is it not a traditional sequel? Because we wanted to push the gaming experience from the original game as far as we could—that includes adding a multiplayer armory component, which was a huge deal. Me, I'm a competitive player. I'm a PvPer in whatever game I'm playing. And we pushed the envelope with the first one; we won awards and accolades and got called the best movie game ever. All these great things but I still didn't have the capability to play my brother across the country online.

And that clearly had to change.

That clearly had to change, because gaming has changed. Ten years ago, gaming was a very intimate thing; it was like playing solitaire, a real elaborate game of solitaire, but solitaire nonetheless. With online gaming, the concept of gaming has changed entirely. Ironically, it has become more of a social event than it was perceived to be 10 years ago. Now people are gaming for social gratification, not just puzzle solving and figuring out props. It was a real coup to find a way to take that experience, push it further, and add a component that really was going to make it exciting for the PvPers of the world, and that's what we did.

How are the *Riddick* games and films going to tie together, and what is the future of the franchise?

David Twohy and I are bringing in the next *Riddick* [movie]—David Twohy is writing now as we speak—but obviously the game has moved with such velocity that we're going to have the game out before the movie. But with guys like David Twohy and myself that are very adamant about mythology, you've got to respect those artists. It's a tricky dance when you're exploring an IP and the game is basically furthering it, continuing it in the film space. And how you marry the two, the synergy between the two is what Tigon prides itself on. That's the whole game: How do you allow the mythology to grow in a game without compromising the intended direction for the film, when both things are being simultaneously produced? The great solution for us is wanting to push *Dark Athena* as far as we could was to go balls to the walls in the experience that you had, that you enjoyed in 2004, that's familiar to you, and put it on steroids and go through the roof with it. That's basically the approach we took.



Drones function like human beings in *The Matrix:* They're essentially dumb, fleshy hulks, but they can be hijacked and controlled via computer. So watch out when their lights turn white; they'll suddenly become much smarter.

➔ deftly avoids capture, but the incapacitated Johns is not so lucky. After watching a band of thugs—led by mercenary captain Revas (a figure from Riddick's past who sports a mean 'do of quasi-futuristic dreadlocks)—drag Johns off down a set of metallic hallways, you're left to infiltrate the ship. And so begins the Assault.

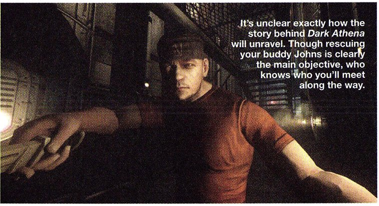
Of course, "assault" is something of a misnomer since the earliest portions of the game focus almost entirely on your stealth and melee abilities. The game features both a dedicated stealth button—which causes Riddick to crouch and move more quietly and tints the screen blue whenever you're fully concealed—and an ability called Eye Shine, which allows Riddick to see in the dark.

Given that you start the game with only a small shiv and are at first unable to pick up any guns since they're literally attached to the drones who wield them (talk about "firearms," right?), these skills definitely come in handy, especially since effectively sneaking up on an enemy will allow you to score a one-hit stealth kill.

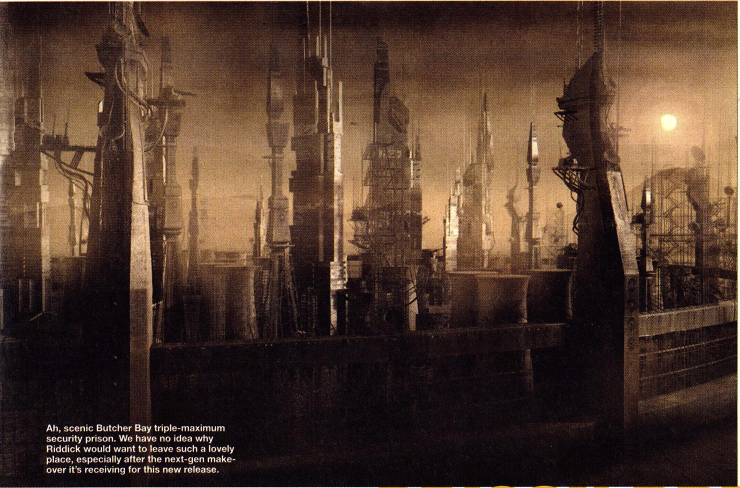
Though it can be difficult to tell whether or not you're properly positioned, pulling off a stealth kill proves to be not only satisfying—thanks to the brutal pre-scripted executions and Riddick's distinctive hooked blade brass knuckles, called Ulaks—but vastly easier than trying to attack any of the surprisingly tenacious bad guys head on. And though fluidly slipping into and out of the shadows to deliver swift and silent death upon your enemies—which can be surprisingly fast and fun, contrary to the stealth aspects of other games—is always the better strategic option, fist fighting in first-person actually feels quite natural and can be equally enjoyable.

Eventually, you're able to acquire the standard set of sci-fi firearms, and the game begins to feel much more like a run-and-gun shooter. At certain points, however, you hijack and control enemy drones, which alters the game dynamic substantially because it allows for a sweet and total disregard for your general safety. Why not run full-bore, guns blazing into a pack of enemies when you have absolutely nothing to lose? Let me tell you, reckless abandon is a riot.

With solid controls and graphics, a near-finished level of polish, and gameplay that demonstrates a lot of potential (seriously, controlling drones is awesome), *Assault on Dark Athena* should ably live up to the original game's positive legacy. Add to that a bright shiny remake of that impressive Xbox title and some truly unique multiplayer (see sidebar), and you should have a ridiculous amount of quality content on one disc… er, Riddick-ulous? ■



It's unclear exactly how the story behind *Dark Athena* will unravel. Though rescuing your buddy Johns is clearly the main objective, who knows who you'll meet along the way.



Ah, scenic Butcher Bay triple-maximum security prison. We have no idea why Riddick would want to leave such a lovely place, especially after the next-gen makeover it's receiving for this new release.

DARK ATHENA

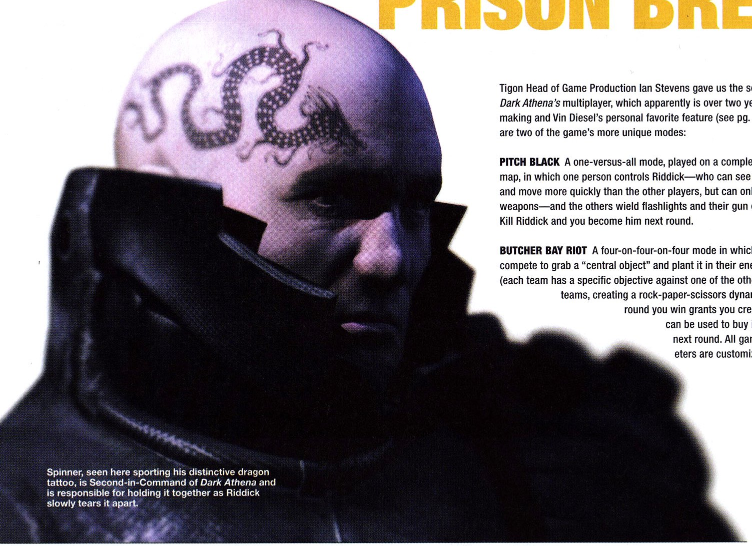
Not much is known about the *Dark Athena* besides the fact that it's a massive mercenary vessel whose drone soldiers are essentially lobotomized prisoners from other ships. Who knows what could be lurking within its depths...

PRISON BREAK

Tigon Head of Game Production Ian Stevens gave us the scoop on *Dark Athena's* multiplayer, which apparently is over two years in the making and Vin Diesel's personal favorite feature (see pg. 61). Here are two of the game's more unique modes:

PITCH BLACK A one-versus-all mode, played on a completely dark map, in which one person controls Riddick—who can see in the dark and move more quickly than the other players, but can only use melee weapons—and the others wield flashlights and their gun of choice. Kill Riddick and you become him next round.

BUTCHER BAY RIOT A four-on-four-on-four mode in which teams compete to grab a "central object" and plant it in their enemy's base (each team has a specific objective against one of the other two teams, creating a rock-paper-scissors dynamic). Each round you win grants you credits, which can be used to buy items in the next round. All game parameters are customizable.



Spinner, seen here sporting his distinctive dragon tattoo, is Second-in-Command of *Dark Athena* and is responsible for holding it together as Riddick slowly tears it apart.

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

BY JONATHAN TODD AND CHRIS HUDAK

SINGULARITY

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: October

GENRE: First-person Shooter

PUBLISHER: Activision

DEVELOPER: Raven Software

EINSTEIN'S NIGHTMARES

Undocumented fusion-based technology, causality-violating applied science, detrimental effects to organic life and inanimate objects alike, and the sort of legendary, lasting, Safety-Is-Job-One quality you can only really find amid the rusting, jerry-rigged and/or occasionally radioactive tangles of disused, Cold War-era, Soviet apparatuses.

What could possibly go wrong?

THERE'S A RUSSIAN PROVERB THAT STATES, "EVERY ROAD HAS TWO DIRECTIONS"—AND TIME IS A ROAD WE ALL TRAVEL, WILLINGLY OR OTHERWISE, NYET? THIS TIME-TWISTING SHOOTER, SET IN 1950S RUSSIA, HAS A FEW TEMPORAL TRICKS UP ITS SLEEVE.

FUTURE IMPERFECT

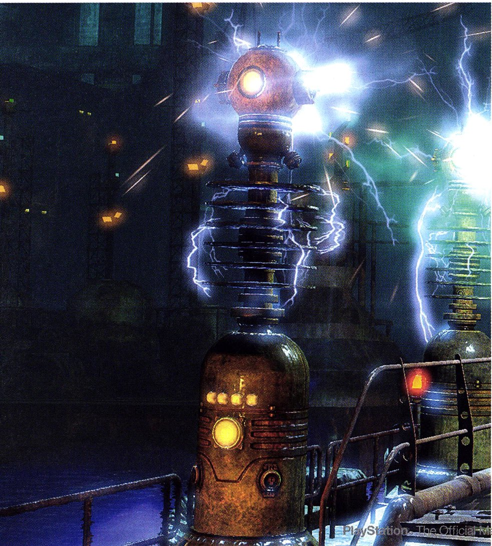
True, we've witnessed time manipulation gameplay mechanics in the past, but Raven Software is turning the concept on its noggin. The Madison, WI-based studio (whose past credits include *HeXen* and *Jedi Academy)* has a fresh vision for how time can work, and how rather than you having control, it controls you. As far as starting points go, it's an exciting and refreshing one.

So, then: You're on a recon mission in the unimaginable wonderland of 2010. You've been sent to investigate strange readings that are coming from an island, somewhere off the coastline of Russia. As you explore the ruins of the industrialized land, and work your investigative way to the epicenter of the anomalous readings, you'll learn about the secret state-of-the-art experiments the Russians carried out in the 1950s—experiments in Fusion technology that would have provided them with more than enough extra power to win the Cold War.

Clearly there were hitches; massive, unfortunate, exploding hitches that destroyed the base, killed everyone, and generally put a damper on the whole project. The government of the Soviet Union circa 1950—never afraid to hide its dirty linen in a huge, red-taped, booby-trapped basket—covered it up, leaving you to uncover the story. And that manifests itself through the time-honored videogame method of collecting dubiously forthright audio logs. But you'll also use some limited time-traversing powers to restore devices or evidence damaged beyond repair...or fatally fast-forward your foes into said same condition...

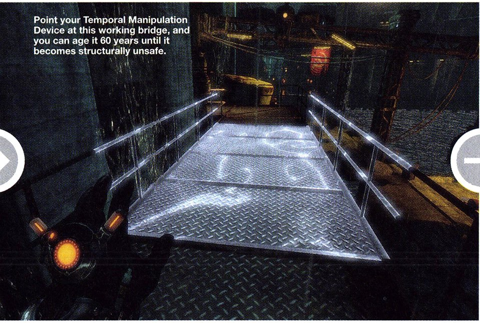
The shadowy (and, evidently, dangerous) experiments involved a substance called Element 99, a reference as clear as triple-filtered vodka to the real-life periodic table element 99, Einsteinium (whose isotopes, incidentally, are crazy radioactive, and known to be extremely toxic...which certainly helps our story along).

In any event, among its other consequences Element 99 seems to have had a nasty mutating effect; not only did it somehow drive exposed inorganic objects to exist outside of linear time, it transformed any exposed organic creatures into something decidedly not human.

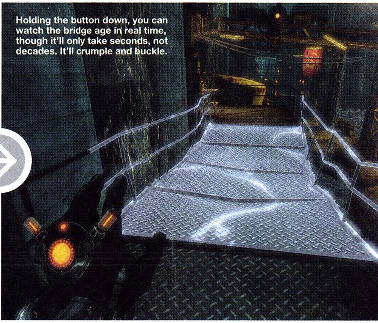


Don't worry. *Singularity* isn't a lecture on general relativity. It's a time-twisting shooter that has a few temporal tricks up its sleeve.

ACCORDING TO GENERAL RELATIVITY, THE INITIAL STATE OF THE UNIVERSE, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BIG BANG, WAS A **SINGULARITY.**



Point your Temporal Manipulation Device at this working bridge, and you can age it 60 years until it becomes structurally unsafe.



Holding the button down, you can watch the bridge age in real time, though it'll only take seconds, not decades. It'll crumple and buckle.

RESPECT MY TEMPORAL AUTHORITAH

Time manipulation is no proper fun if you don't have at least some control over it; I mean, even Dr. Who gets to choose when—if not always where—the TARDIS goes. So, while the world's larger events are still beyond your control (the exploding temporal shockwaves from the center of the island, buffeting you between the key eras of 1950 and 2010, as a big fer-instance) you'll nevertheless be able to enforce your will on smaller objects with the help of your Time Manipulation Device (TMD). Yes, you've guessed it: It's a magical wristwatch.

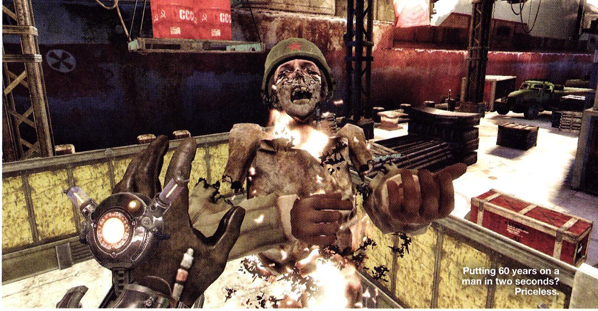
Your TMD also acts as a *Half-Life 2*–style gravity gun, but the way you can use it to mess with time can be obvious, innovative, clever and/or just downright icky. Are you in 2010, and facing a dilapidated control panel? Fire your TMD at it, and slap it straight back to the 1950s, when it was still spanking new. Perhaps you're in 1950, and facing a soldier who seems a bit too keen to shoot you: No problem, just train your TMD on his own precious mortal coil, and see how he likes the weight of 60 years piling down on him all at once. Point the TMD at a perfectly usable bridge and hold the fire button down...and watch the span radically deteriorate before your eyes, crumbling and sagging to the point of being completely unsafe to use (now would be an excellent time for a squad of enemy soldiers to try marching across it). If this all seems a bit god-like, it's balanced by the fact you can't actually fire your weapon while any of this is happening.

What else? You can use the gravity-gun functionality to rip a riot shield from a guy's hands, then ram it back into his guts. Or you might age the metal a few decades, and shatter it with a single shot. Maliciously enhanced entropy is your friend, at least on this battlefield.

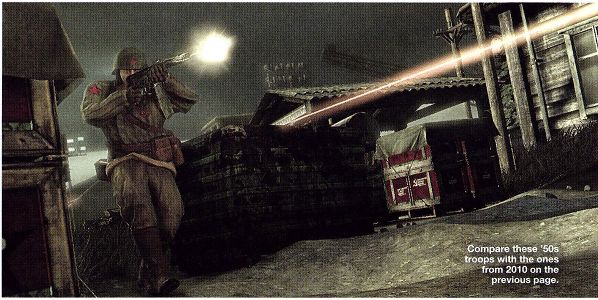
As a core shooter you do have to kill a load of soldiers, but there's usually a run-and-gun way to go about it, and a more thoughtful, time-travelly way to do the same job. Sending out a ping from your TMD will highlight anything sufficiently befouled by some Element 99, and it's nearly always something you can manipulate.

LIKE DUST AND CLOCKS AND PEOPLE

The section of the game we saw came from the middle of the campaign, and started in the modern day in grey, ➲



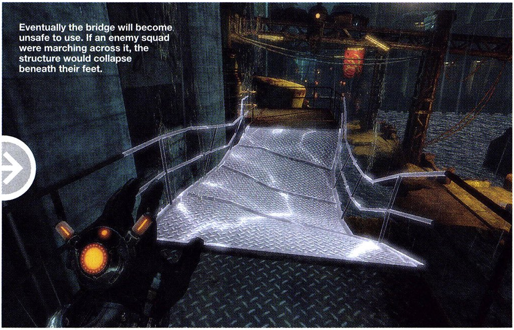
Putting 60 years on a man in two seconds? Priceless.



Compare these '50s troops with the ones from 2010 on the previous page.

DELICATE SOUND OF THUNDER

Modern science's own amiable, soft-spoken, straightforward showman, the late great Carl Sagan, on the potentially universe-rocking bulletpoints of time travel: **www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/time/sagan.html**



Eventually the bridge will become unsafe to use. If an enemy squad were marching across it, the structure would collapse beneath their feet.

rainy, and derelict surroundings. Raven is pushing for a sense of isolation and loneliness, so you'll be without any squad backup or omniscient narrator. In the year 2010, there's nobody on the ground, but you're being hunted by helicopters. Back in the 1950s you'll face squads of soldiers working at the functioning plant.

Nominal master of time or no, there are limits to your powers; you can only affect small items—barrels, padlocks, control panels, other puny humans—unless you're in one of the "amplifiers" that occur at unique points in the story. One of the more spectacular events I witnessed was the raising and rapid repair (un-disrepair, technically) of a long-sunken cargo ship containing information vital to your mission.

But time doesn't like such glaring, massive anomalies; released from its unnatural resurrection, the ship immediately attempts to revert to its rightful, derelict state. As you navigate the vessel's corridors and uncover the evidence of what happened, the ship regressively rusts around you. Pipes begin to burst and this time your unamplified TMD can do precisely jack about it. The ship, with all hands, including you—is sinking.

Of course, this sinking is closely scripted to your own actions. Which direction should you explore next? Taking a turn that won't bring you closer to any crucial evidence sees the ship visibly groan and buckle under the weight of your poor decision. That's not the only problem: The deck is strewn with the severed torsos of men who've been butchered by an unseen enemy, and there's a layering-on of time tricks that allows you to revisit a stable version of the "new ship" from the rapidly decaying, sinking version. I'm still not sure if it makes sense, but it's ballsy and cool.

TIME BOMB

Other timeplay-on-parade in the short demo included the Deadlock—a sort of time grenade or stasis field that can be used to freeze enemies in place, or to provide a shield that no bullet can penetrate. Revert to the TMD's ping effect to scan your immediate area for traces of Element 99 if you get stuck. It'll help you determine which objects can be manipulated.

And Timegatory—a clumsy, Frankenstein's monster of a word—forces those who died on the ship to relive their last seconds, over and over again, on a ghostly loop. These

IT'S ABOUT TIME

Your one-stop guide to *Singularity's* new ideas.

PHASE TICKS

A creature spat out by the glowing, mutant flowers on the walls. They can attack you, or spurt its mutating cargo of Element 99 onto an enemy soldier, turning him into a walking, breathing, undead monster.

DEADLOCKS

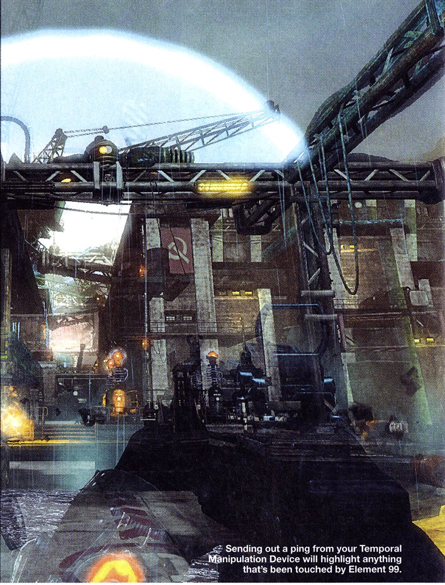
Time grenades that freeze everything that's within a couple of meters radius. Once frozen, you can destroy the Deadlock device to kill everything in its grip—or just use it as a shield. The choice is up to you.

TIMEWAVE

This massive blue sphere that grows from the center of the island lets you know that something's seriously up with time. As it sweeps over you, you're instantly transported 60 years into the past, but your body stays exactly in the same spot it was before.

TIMERIFT

This stable, but temporary, portal lets you walk freely between eras. You can't normally do this, so when the game lets you, you can be sure there's a puzzle to be solved. Best get in there and solve it, then.



Sending out a ping from your Temporal Manipulation Device will highlight anything that's been touched by Element 99.

TIMEGATORY

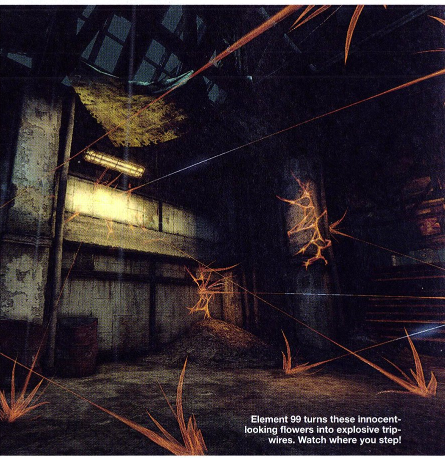
Perhaps the worst word in gaming since "Zombines," these echo events are a side effect of the experiments. The term describes the ghosts of the ship crew reliving their deaths, over and over again in a perpetual loop.

ELEMENT 99

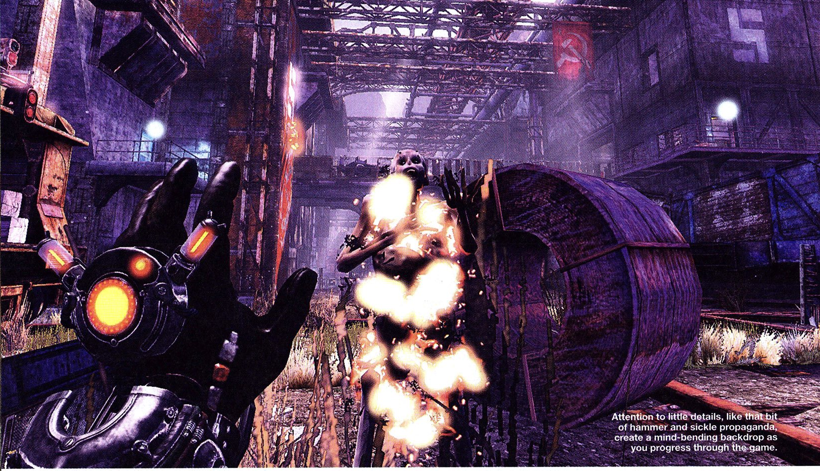
The mysterious Element 99 is the key to interacting with items through time. Unfortunately, it's also the thing that appears to be creating all those monsters that want to kill you. Your TMD will scan the area for items rich in Element 99 that you can manipulate.

SINGULARITY

Many theories in physics have mathematical singularities of one kind or another. Equations for these physical theories predict that the rate of change of some quantity becomes infinite or increases without limit. This is generally a sign for a missing piece in the theory, as in the "Ultraviolet Catastrophe" and in "renormalization."



Element 99 turns these innocent-looking flowers into explosive trip-wires. Watch where you step!



Attention to little details, like that bit of hammer and sickle propaganda, create a mind-bending backdrop as you progress through the game.

include people drowning in the air you're breathing and men getting dragged helplessly down corridors by the boss you're probably about to face.

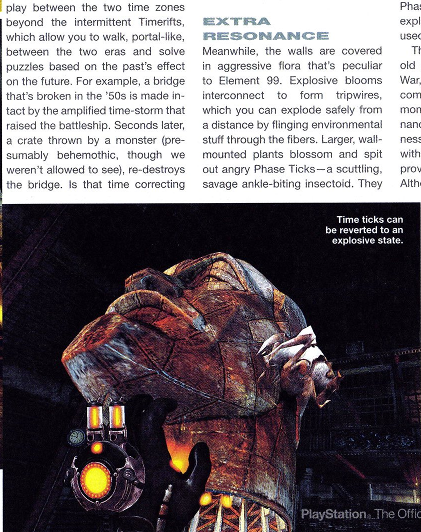
There's also an intelligent interplay between the two time zones beyond the intermittent Timerifts, which allow you to walk, portal-like, between the two eras and solve puzzles based on the past's effect on the future. For example, a bridge that's broken in the '50s is made intact by the amplified time-storm that raised the battleship. Seconds later, a crate thrown by a monster (presumably behemothic, though we weren't allowed to see), re-destroys the bridge. Is that time correcting itself? Or was the bridge broken before, er, it got broken? Yes, paradoxes are a predictable staple of repeated time travel, but when they're done well, they can still make you stop and have a little think.

EXTRA RESONANCE

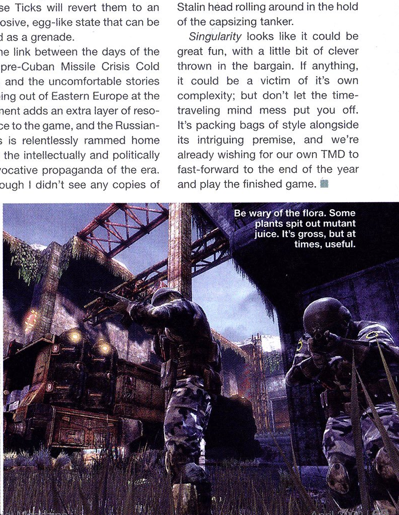
Meanwhile, the walls are covered in aggressive flora that's peculiar to Element 99. Explosive blooms interconnect to form tripwires, which you can explode safely from a distance by flinging environmental stuff through the fibers. Larger, wall-mounted plants blossom and spit out angry Phase Ticks—a scuttling, savage ankle-biting insectoid. They also act as a reproductive mechanism for the mutant element, bursting podfuls of the stuff onto people, turning them into fleshy, *Resident Evil*-esque monstrosities. In a tidy touch, using your TMD on these Phase Ticks will revert them to an explosive, egg-like state that can be used as a grenade.

The link between the days of the old pre-Cuban Missile Crisis Cold War, and the uncomfortable stories coming out of Eastern Europe at the moment adds an extra layer of resonance to the game, and the Russianness is relentlessly rammed home with the intellectually and politically provocative propaganda of the era. Although I didn't see any copies of Roses For Stalin (an excellent painting in which a group of adoring children present the revolutionary mass murderer with a bunch of red and white roses), we got the next best thing—a massive, disconnected Stalin head rolling around in the hold of the capsizing tanker.

Singularity looks like it could be great fun, with a little bit of clever thrown in the bargain. If anything, it could be a victim of it's own complexity; but don't let the time-traveling mind mess put you off. It's packing bags of style alongside its intriguing premise, and we're already wishing for our own TMD to fast-forward to the end of the year and play the finished game. ■



Time ticks can be reverted to an explosive state.

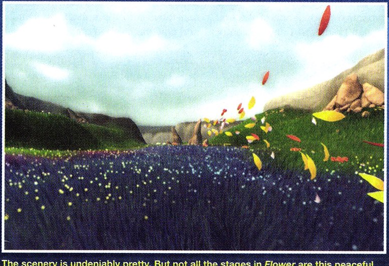


Be wary of the flora. Some plants spit out mutant juice. It's gross, but at times, useful.

PlayStation Network

PSN

Watching the PSN evolve since launch has been akin to observing a toddler stumbling through its first steps—taking risks, experimenting, finding and developing a voice and personality, and eventually, becoming a full-fledged, respected member of society. When we first started covering PSN games, they were little more than tech demos, and our 50-word reviews were plenty to address all the major talking points. Gradually, PSN has blossomed, displaying inspired titles, modern re-imaginings of old classics, and games that…aren't quite games. As gamers and critics, we may not always enjoy the results, or we may consider them decent yet overpriced, but we applaud the fact that the PSN is becoming a space that spurs creativity and risk-taking. Nine of the most recent games deserved special attention, so whatever your gamer type and preference, you should find something suitable for download.



The scenery is undeniably pretty. But not all the stages in *Flower* are this peaceful. Be prepared for a surprise or two.

Flower

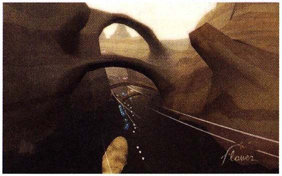
PRICE: $9.99 | DEVELOPER: thatgamecompany

[+] Genova Chen calls his game poetry. And he's more correct than you'd think. When you're tilting that Sixaxis, guiding the wind to collect flower petals through six gorgeous stages, it's visual poetry. Hundreds of flame- and pastel-hued petals somersaulting beneath a cloud-filled sky, a tail of color twirling behind like a Chinese ribbon dance or skimming across blades of glitter-specked grass, while the gentle hum of bells and keyboard soothe in the background. It's impressive, it's atmospheric, it's cinematic, but is it a game? More importantly, is it a *fun* game?

To answer the first question: yes, indeed it is a game—to progress you have to solve puzzles. Granted, the puzzles are little more than "collect all the petals from the red flowers to activate the windmill/part the rock wall/breathe life back into dead terrain." But each stage looks and *feels* different, and includes varied landscape, like a rollercoaster wind tunnel or a field of shimmering blue grass. For those looking for more challenge, each stage

NET. WORKING.

»by Teresa Dun



also hides three teal flowers that require more skill to hunt down.

The answer to the second question—is the game *fun?*—is more complicated. On the one hand, there *is* a narrative progression, and it includes unexpected moments that made me smile, gasp in shock, or shake my head at the sad condition of the world. Yet, in spite of the beauty, in spite of the joy of discovery, I felt… unfulfilled. Oh, no doubt, the colors and glitter and tingling bells are seductive, and the combined experience is powerful, but *something* is missing. Perhaps the world is too limited—constricted as it is by invisible walls—and I just want to travel freely and explore. Perhaps the game is too short, as it only took me a few hours to complete. Perhaps I'm just too much a "gamer" and need the puzzles to be more challenging and complex. That said, *Flower* is still an impressive technical achievement and a memorable, compelling experience (and yes, Trophy whores, there are Trophies), I just wish the game offered a touch *more.*

Teresa Dun

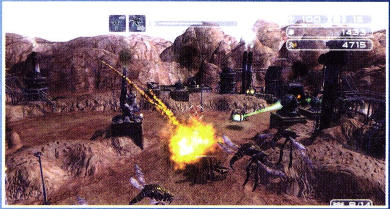
THE BEST PSN GAMES

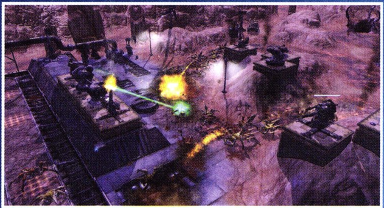
We're like doting parents—we incessantly watch the growth and evolution of the PSN. But you probably have a life. So, in case you missed them, here are some of our favorite PSN offerings, smartly categorized for different types of gamers. Without further ado…

For the Masochistic Gamer

TOP PICK:
Mega Man 9 ($9.99)

OTHER GREAT OPTIONS:
- *Siren: Blood Curse* ($39.99)
- *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* ($9.99)
- *PAIN* ($9.99)





Savage Moon

PRICE: $9.99
DEVELOPER: Fluffy Logic

[+] It's a classic science fiction scenario: humans have depleted the Earth of all its resources. Desperate to find a way to sustain our hungry civilization (and make a tidy profit), we've started digging into a trio of imoons—"living asteroids," if you will. But it's not collapsing mines or gaseous atmospheres that present the biggest threat to our excavations; it's the endless waves of deadly (not to mention icky) insectocytes that the imoons produce to ward us off. So do we consider its feelings and leave the poor asteroid alone? No, we fight, of course! That's where you step in: building towers, managing funds, and stopping the insectocytes from reaching your mining base.

While the ethics of this future civilization is suspect, the arsenal of towers its people have developed is excellent. Besides the typical machine and anti-aircraft guns, you can construct blocks (thus manipulating the insectocytes' path), particle cannons, repair structures, mine towers (which spew out mines when enemies aren't around), and several other towers. The dozen or so enemies are enough to demand careful strategizing (enemies can fly, burrow underground, and shoot your towers), and a last added touch is the ability to buff up one or two skills (attack power, armor, or cash) on the fly, at the expense of the others. Together, this means you have to act quickly, intelligently, and tactically to outsmart the insectocytes.

Graphically, however, the insects and environments are bland. And while there are online leaderboards, no other multiplayer functionality is available. In fact, after you've beaten the game's 12 stages, the only other mode is the survival-style Vengeance. And that's why, if you only have the funds for only one tower defense game, I recommend *PixelJunk Monsters* over *Savage Moon*. But if you already have *PJM* (or, gasp, don't care for *PJM's* aesthetic) or are rounding out your Trophy collection, *Savage Moon* is complex and challenging enough to make it a worthwhile purchase.

Teresa Dun

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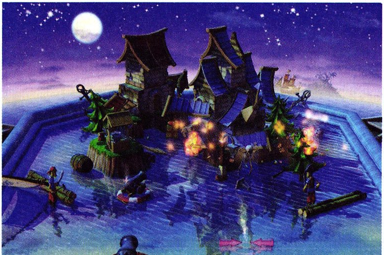
Magic Ball

PRICE: $9.99 | **DEVELOPER:** Creat Studios/TikGames



[-] Hey, remember the classic arcade game *Arkanoid?* Yeah, the one with a paddle at the bottom of the screen, which you used to bounce a ball against a bunch of blocks at the top of the screen until eventually the blocks broke. But you couldn't let the ball get past the paddle or you'd lose! Oh no! (Okay, so it was fun in the '80s…) All right, now picture, instead of blocks, you're hitting random objects like palm trees and sharks and horses, and that they drop an equally nonsensical array of power-ups (think: cannons, magnets, and night-time, if that's even a buff), and boom! You've got *Magic Ball.* It's bright, it's whacky, but it's not fun. And it would only be worth $10 if it came with a $10 rebate. Pass!

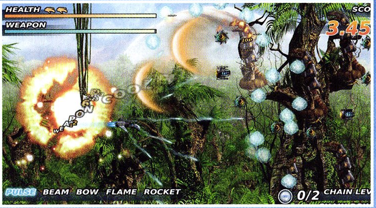
Scott Butterworth

I gotta do everythin' meself!

For the Brainiac

TOP PICK:
Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness ($14.99 per episode)

OTHER GREAT OPTIONS:
- *Lumines Supernova* ($14.99)
- *echochrome* ($9.99)
- *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* ($9.99)



Söldner-X: Himmelsstürmer

PRICE: $9.99 | **DEVELOPER:** SideQuest Studios

[-] Two-dimensional scrolling shooters (or "shmups") follow a very simple format: avoid flying pixels while zapping as many enemies as possible while the screen gradually crawls towards some kind of boss battle. In order to stand out, a shmup must either execute this formula to absolute perfection or introduce some kind of compelling twist. And while *Söldner-X: Himmelsstürmer* gets all of the basics right—providing, for the most part, a beautiful and well-constructed experience—it fails to perfect or innovate.

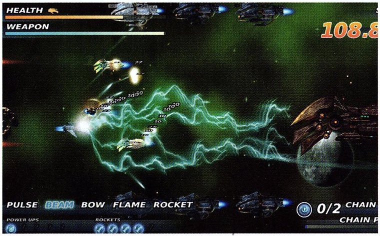
The basic gameplay comes with a handful of minor but persistent annoyances. The two primary weapons—your basic, everyday pulse and beam rifles—feel pathetically weak even on the easiest setting. They can be upgraded by snagging floating icons as you go, but this means you'll be totally screwed should you ever die and thus lose all of the extras you've accumulated.

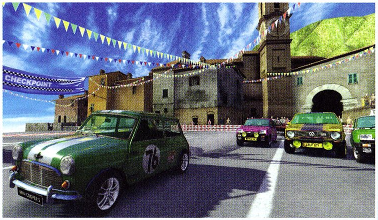
Also, there's nothing particularly elegant or imaginative about the arrangement of enemies (who can be difficult to distinguish from the surrounding environment), and the boss battles, rather than serving as creative new challenges, are simplistic and tedious.

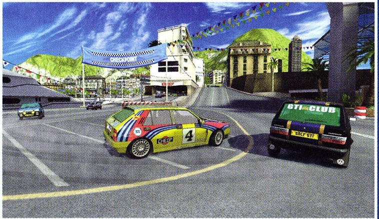
The game's only vaguely original idea is its chaining system, which only requires that you continue using the same weapon until you've defeated a certain number of enemies. But this is more of an arbitrary inconvenience than an engaging gameplay mechanic.

I *want* to like *Söldner-X*, I really do, because the PSN needs more shmups and *Söldner-X* possesses all the right pieces, on paper at least. But truthfully, veterans are likely to find it generic and annoying, and more casual players will probably just be frustrated by it. If you're desperate for a shmup, $10 isn't a bad deal, but really, you should hold out for a better game.

Scott Butterworth







GTI Club+: Rally Côte d'Azur

PRICE: $9.99 | **DEVELOPER:** Sumo Digital

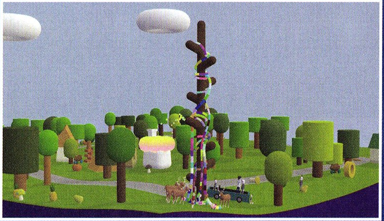
[+] Originally released for the arcade by Konami in 1996 as *GTI Club*, *GTI Club+* sports enhanced graphics, new game modes, and a few new car variations. The restoration scores high marks for its hi-def visuals and smooth frame-rate: the cars and the streets of Ville De Circo look quite inviting. But under the hood, the game is a little low on horsepower with just an easy, medium, and hard version of the same basic circuit to race on. Any moderately skilled racer will dominate the tracks, discover all the secrets and shortcuts, and rake in the Trophies within a day. But online play for up to eight players will keep you hopping behind the wheel (especially the quirky Bombtag mode). If you have a love for hot '80s hatchbacks like the Mini Cooper, VW GTI, and Renault 5 it'll help to maintain your interest, but *GTI Club+* is still a fun little ride—albeit a short one.

Roger Burchill

For the Behind-the-Wheel Fiend

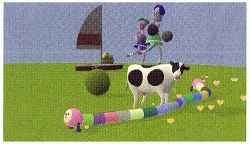
TOP PICK:
WipEout HD ($19.99)

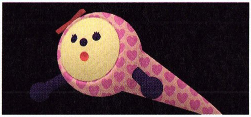
OTHER GREAT OPTIONS:
- *Fatal Inertia EX* ($29.99)
- *Calling All Cars* ($9.99)
- *GTI Club+: Rally Côte d'Azur* ($9.99)
- *Jet Moto 2* ($5.99)



Noby Noby Boy

PRICE: $4.99 | DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai

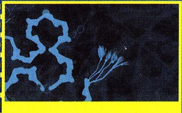




[-] Glance at any screenshot and you can sense the similarities between *Noby Noby Boy* and the *Katamari* series: eccentric art style, seemingly indecipherable gameplay, and a strong whiff of absurdity. But *Katamari* creator Keita Takahashi takes a bold step with *Noby Noby Boy:* he doesn't just make the gameplay obtuse…he removes it altogether. True, by manipulating the analog sticks and L2/R2 buttons, you can make Boy stretch—and ostensibly, stretching Boy and reporting the length to Girl (a planet-spanning creature who grows as PS3 owners around the world upload their lengths, thus unlocking new planet-themed maps) is the goal—but if you spend just 10 minutes in the game, you realize…that's not the point at all.

Noby Noby Boy has no point. It's a playground, an aquarium, a sandbox. The game provides the toys—turnips and trees and donut-shaped clouds—and you just *play* with them. You can eat a human and then a tree. When you "poop" them back out, maybe a cool mix of the two will appear. You can try to wind your body around a monkey bar, or leap through a cloud. The more you experiment, the more you're rewarded with (and *only* with) the joy of discovery. It's too bad an uncooperative camera makes it hard to actually see what's happening most of the time. Overall, *Noby Noby Boy's* major draw is for its easy-to-earn Trophies, but if you desire actual gameplay from your games, you won't find it here.

Teresa Dun



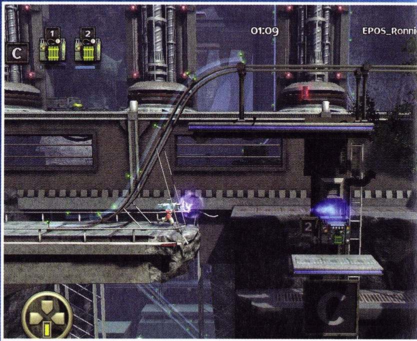
For the Eye-candy Addict

TOP PICK:

PixelJunk Eden ($9.99)

OTHER GREAT OPTIONS:

- *Flower* ($9.99)
- *Linger in Shadows* ($2.99)
- *PowerUp Forever* ($9.99)



Crash Commando

PRICE: $9.99 | DEVELOPER: EPOS Game Studios

[+] Quick bursts of side-scrolling, arcadey, multiplayer action; eight creative maps sprinkled with tanks, turrets, and hidden doorways; six weapons with which to destroy up to 11 of your friends…what's not to love? Whether you're perfecting your skill in the 16-stages of the single-player Boot Camp (I highly recommend *practicing* with the sniper rifle and rocket launcher before battling online, so you don't make a fool of yourself like I did) or tearing it up in the various multiplayer modes (Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, and Objectives), *Crash Commando* rewards you with fast-paced action, an online leaderboard, and plenty of Trophies. The controls are a bit unconventional—right analog to aim, left analog to move, L1 to leap using your jetpack—but once you learn them, you love them. If you enjoy shooters and are looking for a quick multiplayer fix, *Crash Commando* will curb your craving.

Teresa Dun

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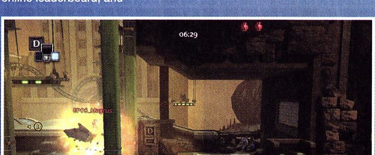
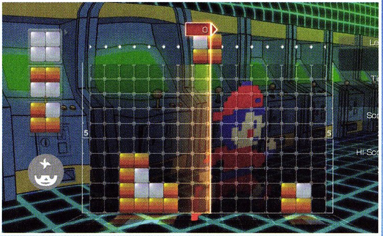
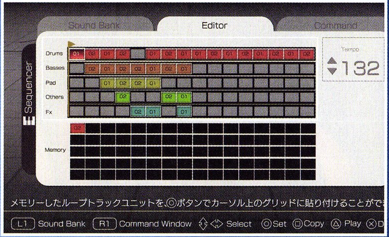
ALL DATA IN TERMINAL A HAS BEEN STOLEN! PROTECT THE DATA IN TERMINALS B AND C!



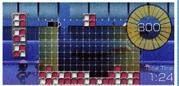




メモリーしたループトラックユニットを、◎ボタンでカーソル上のグリッドに貼り付けることがで

Lumines Supernova

PRICE: $14.99 | **DEVELOPER:** Q Entertainment



[+] Here's a recap, if you've never touched a *Lumines* game: two-by-two squares cascade into a grid, and you need to organize them into patterns before they disappear. So far, so puzzley—but here's why it's different: the four parts of each block are randomly assigned one of two colors, and you need to rotate and place the blocks so the colors form clusters of four, before a bar of justice sweeps across the screen to dissolve them. The "timed" bit is crucial—it's all set to music, with each turn of the blocks triggering a sound effect. Play it right and it builds into a hypnotically rhythmic blur of color and sound.

Supernova retains this basic shape but adds a few additional pieces. Dig Down mode gives you a screen filled with static blocks, which you need to clear within a strict time limit. And the Sequencer from *Lumines II,* which allowed you to make and play along to your own tunes, is expanded to include over 100 different sounds (drums, bass, loads of random noises). It's still much simpler than a computer-based sequencer, but surprisingly versatile and magically makes everything sound okay…-ish.

Occasionally, *Supernova* gets too flamboyant, bombarding you with the most garish moving background and audio (mis) matches. But even during the game's most extreme "Jackson Pollock does disco" moments, it's clearly all in the name of fun.

Jonti Davies

For the "I can only afford one, so it has to be good" Guy

TOP PICK:

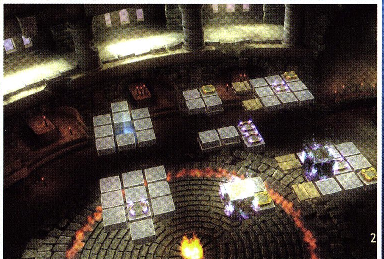
Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix ($14.99)

OTHER GREAT OPTIONS:

- *PixelJunk Monsters* ($9.99)
- *Super Stardust HD* ($9.99)
- *Ratchet & Clank Future: Quest for Booty* ($14.99)

Cuboid

PRICE: $9.99 | **DEVELOPER:** TikGames/Creat Studios



[-] The rules are simple: you're a rectangular block, your goal is to "fall" into a glowing blue exit, and you're only allowed to roll (forwards, backwards, sideways) across a set of tiles hovering in the air. Ignore the empty cathedral beneath the tiles and the candles that inexplicably burst into flame when you've solved enough puzzles. My best guess is that they're a half-hearted (and wholly unsuccessful) attempt at "story," and they're completely irrelevant.

Incomprehensible motif aside, *Cuboid* offers some genuinely brain-grinding puzzles. As I navigated each of the 66 carefully designed grids, I discovered the subtleties of rectangular movement—unfortunately that movement required so many tedious minor adjustments and offered so few satisfying "Aha, I figured it out!" moments (either the puzzle was too easy or I stumbled upon the answer by mistake), that it reminded me of parallel parking: A lot of technical maneuvering for little satisfaction other than the fact you've parked.

But even if you're a super dork (like me) who adores riddles ("Adam, Betty, Chad, Debra, and Elaine are all going to a movie…"), *Cuboid* still isn't worth 10 bucks. Sure, I enjoyed the Trophies, online scoreboards, and the last dozen or so puzzles (which actually offered a challenge), but ultimately, the game's overpriced. But if it's ever on sale for half-price, nab it.

Teresa Dun

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Reviews

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RATINGS

★★★★★ **LEGENDARY**
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

★★★★½ **SUPERB**
Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.

★★★★ **GREAT!**
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

★★★½ **SOLID**
A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.

★★★ **ENJOYABLE**
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

★★½ **MEDIOCRE**
An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.

★★ **SCARRED**
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

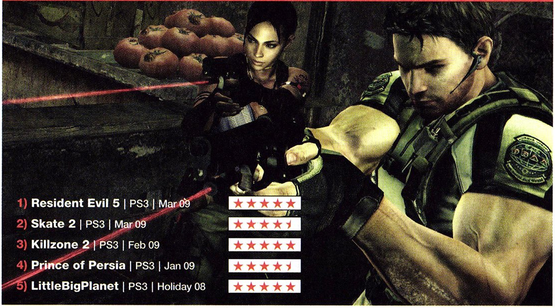
★½ **FRUSTRATING**
"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.

★ **PAINFUL**
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

½ **BROKEN**
Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!

Win junk from Rob's desk! We'll select one winner from emails that correctly identify the three photos from our Rating scale and explain how they're related. Send your answers with the subject line "April Ratings" to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.

Hot 5 List Top Picks from Recent Issues



1) **Resident Evil 5** | PS3 | Mar 09	★★★★★
2) **Skate 2** | PS3 | Mar 09	★★★★½
3) **Killzone 2** | PS3 | Feb 09	★★★★★
4) **Prince of Persia** | PS3 | Jan 09	★★★★½
5) **LittleBigPlanet** | PS3 | Holiday 08	★★★★★

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

This month, *Afro Samurai* has the PTOM crew reminiscing about their past hairstyle choices.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Hair. I remember that. Stuff on your head, right, requiring washing, combing? Ah, those were the days when I had those concerns. But in my youth, I never really messed with it. No crazy perms. No coloring. Wouldn't take it, I was told, as it was too fine, and I couldn't face the thought of handling product every damn day. Now I barely have to think about it, which is a blessing (in balding disguise.)

NOW PLAYING: *Killzone 2, MLB 2K9, GTI Club+, FIFA Soccer 09*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

In fourth grade, Teresa got the bright idea to use a fine-toothed comb as a hair curler. Wrapping her hair onto the comb, she twisted it up to her scalp and promptly entangled it. As her mom was yelling at her to go to dinner, she panicked, grabbed a pair of scissors and *snip*. To this day, the hair hasn't evened out, and she has stubby baby hair poking out the back of her head.

NOW PLAYING: *Dungeon Maker 2, Flower, Bejeweled, CoD: World at War*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

You wouldn't think it looking at Ken's current stylish and cultivated hairstyle, but there was a time when he sported a flowing mane that grew unfettered and free of societies restrictive conventions. Was he part-Lycan or merely channeling '80s hair bands? Only Ken knows for sure, but somewhere beneath that cool, sophisticated exterior beats the heart of a wild man. We'd bet on it.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA Soccer 09*

CARLOS RUIZ
INTERN

My regret isn't a hairstyle I had, it's one I missed out on. One day during an elementary school trip to Mexico, a group of teachers and students came back from the beach sporting cornrows. I was so jealous. I still pass by barbershops wishing I had the courage to transform my image to look like Riley from The Boondocks.

NOW PLAYING: *Crash Commando, Savage Moon, Legendary,* and hangin' out on Home

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

Hmm...where to start? Roger's legacy for ill-conceived hairdos runs long and deep. But if he had to pick one, it's the perm he got in 1985 so he could look like Prince. *Prince?!?* Don't worry, Roger, you'll only "one time" see us laughing. That's right: you'll only see us "...laughing in the purple rain!" Hahahahahahahahaha...

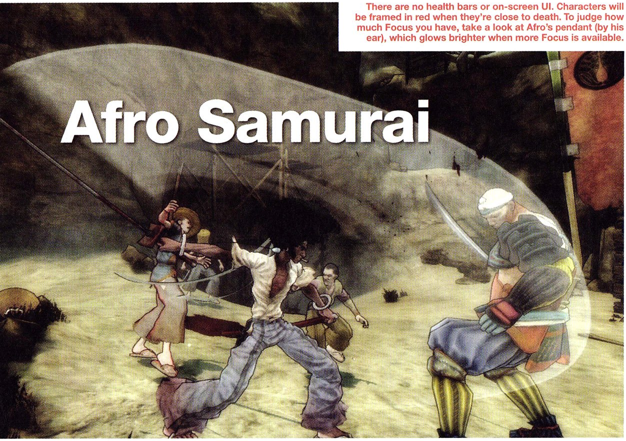
NOW PLAYING: *Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection, X-Blades, GTI Club+*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

During his freshman year of college, Scott let his hair grow out for the first time ever. But when his bangs reached his eyes, he decided he'd had enough. The solution? Have a couple friends shave it into a Mohawk using only a borrowed pair of clippers. His amateur stylists did an admirable job, but Scott still managed to look thoroughly stupid. Never again!

NOW PLAYING: *Street Fighter IV, Killzone 2, The Godfather II* (until it got delayed)

Afro Samurai



There are no health bars or on-screen UI. Characters will be framed in red when they're close to death. To judge how much Focus you have, take a look at Afro's pendant (by his ear), which glows brighter when more Focus is available.

Splashy blood, clanging swords, and...big hair

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Surge

PS3 | R

Talk about a hair fetish. First, there's Afro (literally named after his hairstyle). Then, there's the headband obsession [see sidebar for details]. But my first impression when I booted up *Afro Samurai* wasn't the characters' tresses… it was the bold cel-shaded art direction, the hip-hop soundtrack, and Samuel L. Jackson giving me lip. It wasn't until a few minutes into the game, when I cleanly sliced through an enemy's face using a samurai sword and watched his fuzzed scalp slide to the ground, that I noticed the violence. Those are the traits the game has going for it: atmosphere, edge, gore—all of it highly stylized and purposeful. If you're a fan of the anime or comic and that's all you care about, you won't be disappointed.

The actual combat? Well, it's passable. It's your typical combo-based formula (think *Devil May Cry)* that can too easily devolve into mindless buttonmashing (and the mass amounts of weak enemies that require little effort to destroy inadvertently encourage this). You unlock combos as you level up—but you have to scroll through several menus just to see what moves you've earned (hint: press Select!)—and the bosses, though they require some creative strategies to beat, can also be frustrating. Some of them require you to think of and then perfectly execute a certain skill, like a parry or throw (which you may not even realize you have). The redeeming factor in all of this? Focus. That is, the Focus mode. Hold L1, and Afro will Focus, allowing him to slow down time and literally dice enemies into pieces, which is both visually and tangibly satisfying.

Progressing through the beautiful world can become a challenge, because the game provides vague instructions. "Walk up the wall," it might instruct, and half of the wall will be completely un-climbable. Worse, the story is a jumbled mess for anyone unfamiliar with the *Afro Samurai* storyline (the manual reveals why: Afro's reliving random past memories inside his confused mind, but it would've been nice if the *game* explained this). As a hack-and-slash tribute to its source materials, *Afro Samurai* succeeds with its rewarding battle animations and brutal atmosphere. But frustrating puzzles (that aren't *actually* puzzles) and mediocre combat prevent it from achieving success as a game.

Teresa Dun

★★★

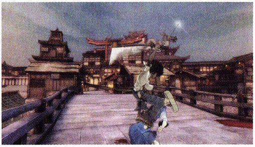
The (Afro) Samurai Code

SAMUEL L. JACKSON
AFRO
SAMURAI

It's simple. The "Number One" rules the world. He wears the ceremonial number one headband and allegedly has god-like powers. He can only be replaced if he's killed by the "Number Two" (who, unsurprisingly, wears the number two headband). Anyone can defeat the Number Two to become the Number Two themselves, but only the Number Two can challenge the Number One. Get it?

So, when Afro's father (the old Number One) was slain by a man named Justice (the old Number Two and reigning Number One), Afro vows vengeance. But the only way to accomplish his goal? You guessed it: he has to become the Number Two first, then track down Justice and defeat him to take his place as Number One.

Afro's story is documented in a five episode anime (and two volume manga) and is hailed for its amazing voice acting (including Samuel L. Jackson, Ron Perlman, and Kelly Hu, who all lend their vocal talent to the game as well) and magnificent soundtrack (produced by RZA, who also produces the game's music).



While you can adjust the up/down inversion of the camera, you're stuck with the game's default left/right configuration. Move the analog to the right, and the camera pans left (and vice versa). Don't like that? Too bad.

Memory of a father: Located in each stage are hidden birds. Find them to learn moves that your father once used.

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ACTION

RESIDENT EVIL 5

Day three of the intense *Resident Evil 5* play-test. Two editors, theoretically working together as Chris Redfield and Sheva Alomar against hordes of infected freaks, trying to work through the game alongside their personal and personality issues. This is co-operative gaming!

"Why the [bleep] did you explode the barrel when I'm standing next to it?"

"Why the [bleep bleep] did you stop?"

"I was being [bleepin' bleep bleep] attacked!!!"

"Dude! You were supposed to keep moving. If I don't shoot the [bleepin'] barrel, Chainsaw gets through the blast zone without a scratch!"

"I was being [bleepin' bleep bleep] attacked!!!"

"Don't worry about the other zombies! Just keep moving! [Bleep.]"

"Alright, alright. Let's just do it again. [Bleep.]"

This Chainsaw encounter encapsulated something – a shift in the beloved *Resident Evil* dynamic, if you will: *RE5* isn't about solitary frights in the dark anymore. It's about hyper-intense, adrenaline-fueled, partner-focused action. This *Evil* will keep you talking during the game, and more importantly, after.

For Redfield the threat of the moment are terrorists taking advantage of a destabilized African government to develop biological weapons; but it soon becomes evident that the threads of his past haven't disentangled and are instead intricately woven into the present crisis.

From the cinematic opening credits that sets the scenario to your first in-game steps onto the dingy dirt streets of Kijuju, you're immediately struck by *RE5*'s stunning level of detail and breathtaking visuals. Perhaps it's the way Chris squints his eyes from the harsh glare of the midday African sun or how the Sheva's skin exhibits a moist perspiration-induced glow from the overbearing heat, but the game's graphics manage to convey an actual sense of immersion in the environment. You squint your eyes,

The Top 7 games of 2009

Start saving! Here are the killer games you'll need to make it through the year

GOD OF WAR III

UNCHARTED 2

TE KNIGHT CHRONICLES

ON SALE NOW

Yes, you can attack from horseback! But it's dull, simplistic, and unresponsive. Not at all like how you'd imagine (or at least hope).

Lord of the Rings: Conquest

One game that won't rule them all

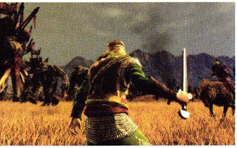
PS3 | R

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: Pandemic

The epic set pieces from the films are indeed present and grand...

...but they're hampered by the glitches and repetitive drudgery.

Put these hideous orcs out of their misery. They drop health orbs.



Man versus oliphaunt? Eh, might be better to trade that sword for a bow.

Uruk-hai grunts are rushing at me, axes held high. In the distance, I see Saruman's tower, and the horns of the film's actual score blare dramatically in the background. I take a moment to register it: I'm at the battle for Isengard. I'm *in* it. And as long as I don't move or do anything, *Lord of the Rings: Conquest* is thrilling. In fact, the game is jam packed with these memorable moments: recreations (and creative re-imaginings) of the films' epic battles. Unfortunately, that's the game's *only* strength.

You pick from four classes—warrior, archer, scout, and mage—and switch between them mid-battle at rally points. Each class has its own specialties (scouts can stealth, for example, and mages can heal) and each is tough to control until you learn how to utilize its strengths. But they *all* become tedious in the single-player campaign for two reasons. First, mission variety is lacking. Most battles require you to capture an area by standing in it, clear the way to a new capture point, kill a specific enemy, and repeat. But second, and more importantly, *Conquest* is full of glitches.

Take my battle at Isengard. I quickly learned not to charge in with my archer and was actually starting to enjoy sniping off the heads of the Uruk-hai. Then the game asked me to kill Wormtongue. (The game takes liberties with the *LOTR* story.) It should've been easy to eke away Wormtongue's life from a distance. In fact, it was. Unfortunately, his corpse slid partially off a cliff, and my next mission was to retrieve the key to Isengard from his corpse...and the game interpreted my attempts to grab the key as suicide, forcing me to restart the entire mission from the beginning.

It's too bad, because *Conquest* has potential. Battling in a hero's shoes (like Gandalf facing off with the Balrog)—which the game occasionally lets you do—and playing the evil campaign, where you help Sauron take over Middle Earth, are both solid ideas. But *Conquest* lacks polish. If you're a hardcore *LOTR* fan, you might play the game and then say you like it (while grimacing), but ultimately, *Conquest* doesn't do justice to either the movies or the books.

Teresa Dun

★★½

Playing Online? Far More Rewarding

Working together with 15 others, marching over the battlefield, and consuming waypoints as part of a more organized strategy is, dare I say it, satisfying. With human-controlled characters, you're guaranteed some useful support in the Team Deathmatch, Conquest Hold, and Capture the Ring modes. My favorite is Conquest Hold, which requires you to seize and then hold areas; these see dozens of enemies come at you. Chaos rules and it's massively exciting. Much like in the films, in fact.

Simon Bramble

The AI does a decent job of healing you with mages when you need it. And you do, against these villians.

A disembodied voice: Actor Hugo Weaving [Elrond in the *LOTR* films] does much of the voice work in *Lord of the Rings: Conquest*.

Dungeon Maker 2:

The Hidden War

The best monster bait? A flair for interior design

PSP MSRP: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: UFO Interactive
DEVELOPER: Global A Entertainment

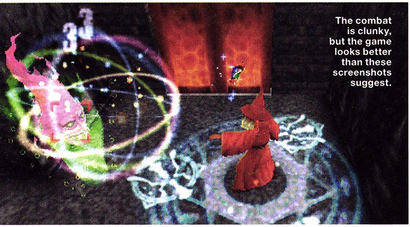
Here's the *Dungeon Maker* universe's four-step guide to dealing with monsters. Step one: construct a long, twisty, multi-tiered dungeon. Step two: spruce up the dungeon's gritty rooms and corridors with fluffy beds, luxurious fountains, wood flooring, and other décor. Step three: crawl through your dungeon and slaughter the monsters lured in by the carefully placed fixings. Step four: sell the loot the monsters leave behind to raise funds to keep extending your dungeon.

Oh sure, there's a story, and plenty of quests, but by now, you already know whether you love or hate the inherently tedious concept. Personally, I adore maximizing the space on each floor of my dungeon to attract the more powerful monsters. (The best part is giving each floor a theme!) I also enjoy helping the townsfolk on quests and watching their personal stories develop. In those aspects, the game is indeed addictive.

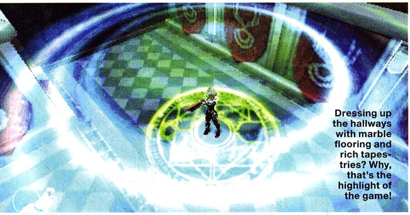
Unfortunately, a bland combat system (you only have four combat moves—swing weapon, use special attack, use magic, and block—and they're all unresponsive) is exacerbated by a flawed camera (it's hard to discern where enemies are). A further frustration is that your shape-shifting combat companion—who's supposed to *help* you—can accidentally whack you. And does. A lot. Fortunately for those craving a new portable RPG, those flaws aren't game-breaking, and if the dungeon-building concept piques your interest (you can share the dungeons you create, too), the game's shortcomings are easy to ignore.

Teresa Dun

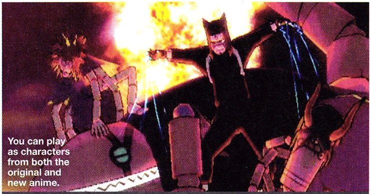
★★★



The combat is clunky, but the game looks better than these screenshots suggest.



Dressing up the hallways with marble flooring and rich tapestries? Why, that's the highlight of the game!



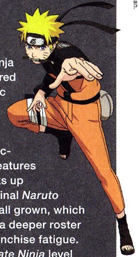
You can play as characters from both the original and new anime.

Ultimate Ninja 4:

Naruto Shippuden

Naruto may have grown, but the game sure hasn't

PS2 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+
PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: CyberConnect2

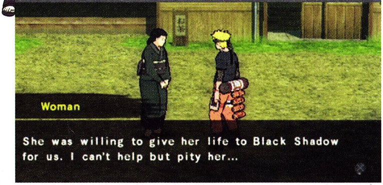


Whoa, has it been a year already? Just last March, we ushered Naruto Uzumaki and his ninja clan through dozens of one-on-one, jutsu-littered battles in *Ultimate Ninja 3,* and now the frenetic fighter is back, basics intact, but with a few noticeable changes.

Fans know this from the title, but for the unaware: *Ultimate Ninja 4* is based on the second Naruto series, *Naruto Shippuden,* and features over 50 playable characters. *Shippuden* picks up nearly three years after the original *Naruto* anime, so the characters have all grown, which helps *Ultimate Ninja 4* present a deeper roster and move set while avoiding franchise fatigue. The combat maintains the *Ultimate Ninja* level of quality—meaning the attacks are still too simple for the "Street Fighters" of the world, but adequate for its intended, more casual audience. The addition of the Master Mode, an action-RPG that reveals a brand new story arc, is deeper than most single-player offerings in fighters, but is ultimately too repetitive. Slow load screens and some annoying voice work don't help, either. But even so, thanks to its modern coat of *Shippuden* paint and graphics on the higher end of the late-gen PS2 scale—and of course, its solid, if now somewhat formulaic, fighting mechanics—*Ultimate Ninja 4* keeps the series' pace going strong.

Henry Gilbert

★★★½



Woman

She was willing to give her life to Black Shadow for us. I can't help but pity her...

Though just premiering in the U.S., *Naruto Shippuden* has already aired nearly 100 episodes in Japan.

Slash or shoot using the Pistol Blades or throw a spell (it doesn't really matter which) while Ayumi subtly distracts enemies with her daring fashion sense.

X-Blades

Ixnay on the X-Blades

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: SouthPeak Games DEVELOPER: Gaijin Entertainment

PS3 | R

It's a sad day for gaming when a girl in a skimpy thong can't keep my attention. And despite a valiant attempt by the *X-Blades* heroine's butt and the strips of floss trying to conceal her assets, there's little to recommend here beyond the gratuitous eye candy.

From characters to story to gameplay, practically every aspect of *X-Blades* seems plucked from some handbook for generic game design. The spunky treasure hunter, Ayumi, is like a genetic hybrid of Sailor Moon and Lara Croft, while the powerful, mysterious artifact storyline could be culled from any *Tomb Raider* or *Prince of Persia* game.

There are two possible game endings dependent on whether you use dark or light magic.

In either a deliberate snub of convention or an unwitting act of mercy, there is no multiplayer mode.

RPG-style level-ups appear to add a layer of gameplay complexity, but the game is a buttonmasher to the core with your most strategic decision being whether to mash the slash, shoot, or throw spell buttons while facing the seemingly endless swarm of respawning enemies. The game even manages to undermine its own challenge by making health crystal power-ups meaningless by virtue of the ability to heal yourself (for a slight cost) at *anytime.* And puzzles? I died multiple times trying to escape a spike trap because I thought I actually had to accomplish something other than avoid impalement. Wrong. I merely had to survive until the next cutscene initiated.

What *X-Blades* lacks in gameplay, it attempts to make up for with splashy visuals. A kaleidoscope of colors, smoke and particle effects, and lens flares galore generate a swirling smorgasbord of graphic noise that is just attractive enough to garner your interest. But an oddly passionless and soulless experience awaits behind the facade. Like Ayumi's rear-end, when something is working that hard to distract you, the only smart move is to keep on walking.

Roger Burchill

★★

SCORE 11700
TIME 1:03
RINGS 47
SONIC
3

PS3 *Sonic* lacks the precise control of the Genesis version, but blame the controller, not the game.

Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection

Not just a bunch of Sonic games

PS3 PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: Backbone Entertainment

Most everyone's initial reaction to *Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection* is, "Well, I guess it'd be cool to have all the *Sonic* games…" It takes a few minutes before the realization hits: "Oh, this is a collection of Sonic's *favorite* Genesis games!" We'll forgive the blue wonder a bit of narcissism as his own Hedgehog games are included (setting a solid foundation for this compilation), but it's the rest of the 40-plus game line-up that makes for a satisfying sampling of SEGA's golden 16-bit era. RPG fans will squeal like anime-schoolgirls at the inclusion of *Phantasy Star II, III,* and *IV* and the *Shining Force* series in particular. Action brawlers, platformers, and puzzle games round out Sonic's *Collection,* with *Shinobi II, Alex Kidd,* and *Columns* among the highlights. Tweaked (to 720p) graphics, Trophies, and unlockables (interviews and nine SEGA arcade classics) enhance the experience beyond the games themselves. There are a few curious selections (Hi, *Flicky.* Hi, *Ristar.*), but overall, Sonic *knows* old school games.

Roger Burchill

★★★★

5700
5700
x2

Altered Beast…meh. Unlock the arcade version (also included) if you're going to bother playing it.

GamesRadar.com Top 7...
Bad guys you didn't want to kill

The gaming murders that left a bad taste in our mouths

The Colossi

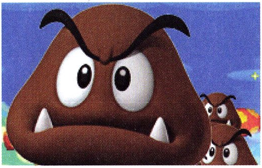
Shadow of the Colossus

Most of these huge beasts are just minding their own business and only attack once provoked. Colossus 13 doesn't even retaliate, instead merely attempting to shake you off. They clearly feel pain too - stab them in the head and you'll know about it. Come on, one of them's even got a cool beard, yet you still killed it, didn't you? It's dead now. You did it. Shame on you.

Wanna read more?

- Stereotypical gamers we hate
- Gaming nudity you didn't notice
- Secret shame games

Head to:
gamesradar.com/top7



Goombas

Super Mario Bros.

If you stand still and they hit you, you die, but then that's true of buses and you don't go around stamping on them. You only get 100 points per kill too - the gaming equivalent of a $5.00 whole chicken. Has life really become so discounted?

GLaDOS

Portal

Just as hostages can come to bond with their captors, so you end up liking GLaDOS - the female-voiced computer in Portal, the Best Game Ever Made (TM). Guilt for killing her is prolonged because you have to do it a piece at a time. While she talks to you. (Sniff.)

Orbinaut

Sonic the Hedgehog

After these critters toss their spikes they're just cute, marshmallowy-looking creatures that just stare and slowly move forwards. They're now totally harmless. Are you really such a bastard that you'd kill them? Yep, us too. But we felt dirty afterwards.

Big Daddies

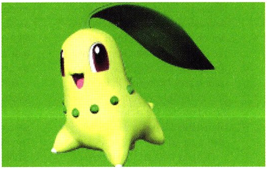
BioShock

They're huge, ugly, armed with a massive drill and turn violent with only the smallest provocation, but the Big Daddies still make us sad when they die. They're only protecting their Little Sister after all. 'Wake up, Mr Bubbles?' Sorry, ain't gonna happen.

Spotty Bulorb

Pikmin

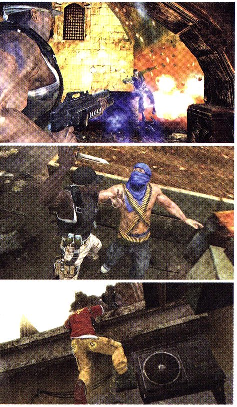
This is the angry mob lynching of gaming, The Spotty Bulorb is surrounded in its sleep, worn down and then killed. While its children watch! Or maybe you killed them first? OK, so it's just like nature. But nature can be so cruel.



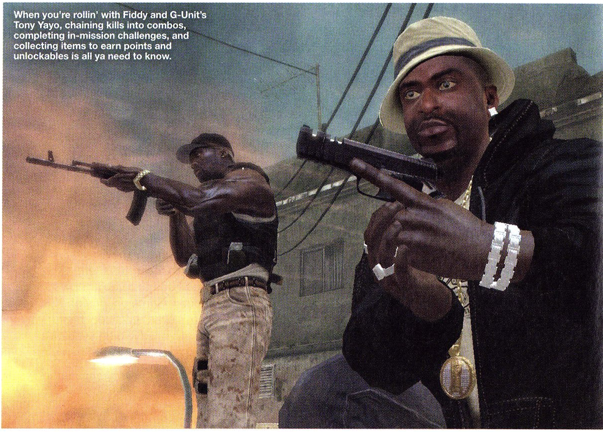
Level 1

Pokemon

You've been playing for ages and you run into a low-level Pokemon. That's when you realise your super-powered team of fighters has become a remorseless unit. What chance does a level 2 Pidgey have against your level 67 Glaceon?



Exploding barrels, bullet-time, and brutal melee counter-kills? Sweet!



When you're rollin' with Fiddy and G-Unit's Tony Yayo, chaining kills into combos, completing in-mission challenges, and collecting items to earn points and unlockables is all ya need to know.

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

Surprising for more than just its lack of sand

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Swordfish Studios

PS3 | R

I have so many jokes whirling around my head right now. I mean, an over-the-top co-op shooter that features a real-life rapper mowing down third-world mercenaries/drug dealers/puppy-kickers in pursuit of a diamond-encrusted skull? How could this *not* be hilarious! But truth be told, the absurdity of the premise belies the quality of the game. Though undeniably unoriginal in format and irritatingly repetitive, *50 Cent: Blood on the Sand* packs plenty of mindless fun into a surprisingly well-built game.

Despite the fact that it never dares to stray from convention, *Blood on the Sand's* core gameplay is totally solid. The movement and aiming controls function without issue, and although trying to slowly maneuver between pieces of cover feels clumsy, running and ducking behind cover (when necessary) works perfectly, and makes the game feel like more than just a straight up run-and-gun. And although the tight camera, gratuitous weaponry, and sound effects make for gratifyingly visceral combat, the outlandish story, arcade-style combo system, and all-rap soundtrack keep the mood light, as if to emphasize the idea that the game is simply meant to be unpretentious fun.

But while the action never stops, it also never changes, and this proves to be the game's biggest problem. It becomes formulaic very quickly: you smash the same crates, jump down the same holes, and fight the same reasonably-intelligent-but-still-not-particularly-interesting bad guys for the entire game. The arcade elements—such as the combo system—fail to compensate for this lack of variety because the crowded HUD can make it difficult to tell what's happening on screen. Plus, the game never issues any challenges beyond the terribly uncreative "kill these guys in this amount of time." Similarly, every single boss battle requires you to fight a helicopter, and you'll only encounter *two* types of cooperative moments (lifting doors and boosting your partner up to a ledge) in the entire game, meaning the only reason to play with a friend is to share a laugh over the dialogue.

The end result is a solid (albeit repetitive) shooter with some interesting ideas. But this game never set out to change the world. The premise alone is indication enough that it's intended to be mindless fun, and in that regard, *Blood on the Sand* succeeds admirably. If you and a friend have an afternoon to kill, you could definitely do worse than stomping sandcastles with Fiddy.

Scott Butterworth

★★★½

Nobunaga's Ambition:

Iron Triangle

Resistance is feudal

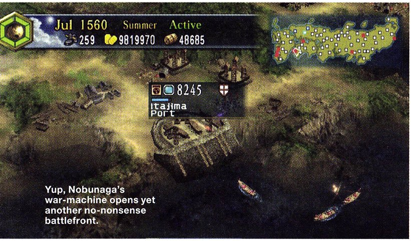
PS2 MSRP: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: KOEI DEVELOPER: KOEI

Even for the niche-y, nerdo ranks of no-frills strategy titles, *Iron Triangle* is not for the weak. For starters, the strategic map of Japan—a sprawling 3D landscape as seen from on high—is a frankly intimidating mass of serious-looking unit statistics, production tables, R&D milestones, structure/upgrade listings, and still-portrait dialogue boxes, punctuated with numerous dire text updates on how well your rise to power is going or—more often—*isn't.*

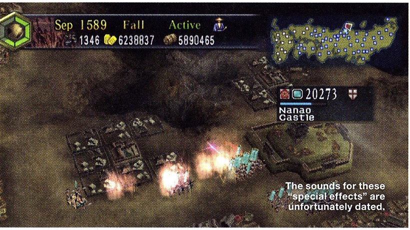
Once you know what you're about, it's compelling (if not terribly eye-pleasing). When you *do* manage to properly expand your castle town, recruit the troops you need, forge diplomatic relations and/or establish trade with foreign nations, and go looking for some regional ass to kick with your newly-acquired rams and mounted muskets, the real military-conquest meat of the festivities is rendered from the aforementioned general's-eye view, with understandably tiny, strategic-scale visuals. So it's time to focus on this, and this alone, to have any hope of finding success.

Much of this may sound like a knock against *Iron Triangle.* It's not. It's merely a warning: If you aren't prepared for a lengthy courtship with the thankfully thorough tutorials (and still further prepared to gradually steep yourself in the unapologetically dry complexity) this game will chop off your head and do dishonorable things down your neck. *Caveat emptor-san.* Chris Hudak

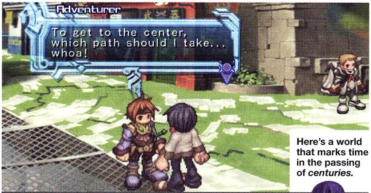
★★★



Yup, Nobunaga's war-machine opens yet another no-nonsense battlefront.



The sounds for these "special effects" are unfortunately dated.



Adventurer

To get to the center, which path should I take... whoa!

Here's a world that marks time in the passing of *centuries.*

Ar tonelico II:

Melody of Metafalico

It's that time of the millennium...

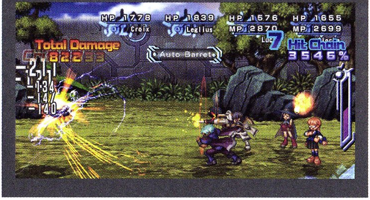
PS2 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen
PUBLISHER: NIS America
DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai

Thank the Goddess *somebody* is still supporting the rogue, Japanese-style RPG in all its venerable *otaku* glory. Here's an "innocently" rendered, super-deformed JRPG, set in a world that connects you to the characters via innuendo-laden, dating-sim elements. Dive into the mindscapes of the all-important Reyvateil mistresses, getting to know their virtual personalities and hammering out their issues—challenges that actually have tangible effects in the "real" game-world.

AT2 features the turn-based combat of RPG yore, albeit broken into offense/defense phases with a rewarding, real-time scheme. The random-battle bane of many a high-fantasy adventure now has, at least, some manner of warning. But one large, hobbling minus comes in the form of a boss-battle glitch late in the game—this bug can end your game, depending on how much you've saved and leveled up.

Multiple endings and disparate story-threads almost balance out that bit of post-production unpleasantness (which you can defray but probably won't be able to avoid entirely), but if you're looking for visual pizzazz, *AT2* isn't your game—it's squat, big-headed, and cute, at best. The mechanics and heart, however, kick their own roster of engrossing, albeit low-tech, RPG Reyvateil. If you know what I mean. Chris Hudak

★★½



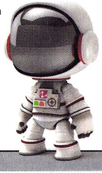
Racy... *AT2* is beyond what a more gentlemanly assessment could justifiably label "borderline pervo" gameplay.

» FREE IS A GOOD FOUR LETTER WORD

GET **FREE STUFF!**

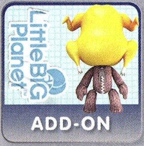
If, as they say, time is money, then spending hours toiling through the PlayStation Store searching for the rare quality freebie is expensive. So don't. We did the work for you!

Enjoy this collection of PSN freebies that we've compiled on *our* time and dime. You can repay us in fan art, letters, or two-year PTOM subscriptions for all your friends.



For your brain

Freebie whores, invest in these DLC-heavy titles… you'll get shivers every time you snatch their free content add-ons from the PlayStation Store.



LittleBigPlanet

If you blinked, you've already missed some of *LBP's* limited-time freebies, like the Thanksgiving turkey head, launch-day space suit (geddit?), and holiday Santa outfit. But fret not; others (specifically, the Sack-Eating Plant, Sack-in-the-Box, and Kabuki Actor costumes) are still available. And if that isn't enough to satisfy your freebie-lovin' itch, Media Molecule has promised once-a-week giveaways. Yes, sometimes it's nice to let your anticipation simmer, but in this case, faster is better. Nab them while they're hot (and still available).

ROCKBAND

Rock Band freebies

"Charlene (I'm Right Behind You)" by Stephen and the Colberts
"Headphones On" by Miranda Cosgrove
"Promised Land" by Vesuvius
"Still Alive" GLaDOS and Jonathan Coulton (*Portal* song)

GUITAR HERO WORLD TOUR

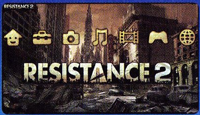
Guitar Hero: World Tour freebies

Reggae Rock Track Pack:
"Your Face" by Pepper
"Jimi" by Slightly Stoopid
"Sacrifice" by Expendables

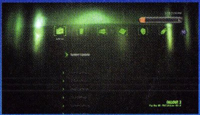
Guitar Hero III freebies

"Top Gun Anthem" as performed by Steve Ouimette
"The End Begins (to Rock)" from God of War II
"I am Murloc" World of Warcraft Single, by Level 80 Elite Tauren Chieftain
"We Three Kings" as performed by Steve Ouimette

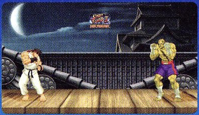
The Best *Official* Ways to Dress Up your PS3



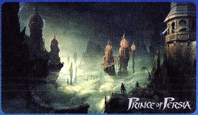
Resistance 2 Chicago theme



Fallout 3 Pip-Boy theme



Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix wallpaper

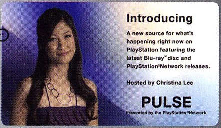


Prince of Persia wallpapers

For your eyes

Don't miss these free HD clips. You may have already watched them online, on YouTube, or wherever, but nothing beats the impact of seeing them on your HDTV.

- *God of War III* trailer
- *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* trailer
- Pulse
- Qore: Episode 07
- Just for fun: *FaceBreaker* audition videos



Introducing

A new source for what's happening right now on PlayStation featuring the latest Blu-ray™ disc and PlayStation®Network releases.

Hosted by Christina Lee

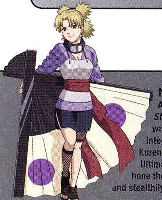
PULSE

Presented by the PlayStation®Network

For your ears

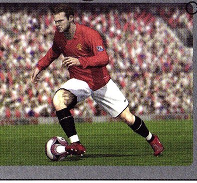
All of the free music available on the PSN, composed into a single, easy-to-read checklist.

- *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* – 5 tracks
- *Lair* – 1 track
- *Linger in Shadows* – 3 tracks
- *PAIN* – 1 track
- *Mirror's Edge* – 1 track



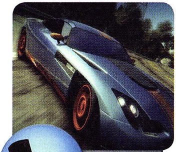
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm

A *Naruto* fan must-have, *Ultimate Ninja Storm* offers hours of additional content with its free Storm Packs. The Packs integrate new characters (Shizune, Asuma, Kurenai, and Anko, so far) along with new Ultimate Missions. Massage your fingers and hone those fighting reflexes by leaping online and stealthily acquiring the game's free goodies.



FIFA Soccer 09

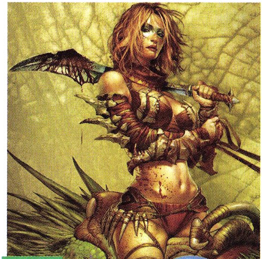
Indulge your ears with any of 15 different commentary packs, which feature real-life commentators from various countries. You'll have to understand foreign tongues to truly enjoy the language packs, but if you're reading this, you speak English, so at the very least, get the two English commentary packs (featuring Andy Gray, Martin Tyler, Clive Tyldesley, and Andy Townsend). And since they're free, grab the rest anyway.



For your feet

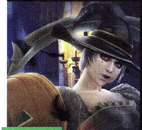
Burnout Paradise

We've touted *Burnout Paradise* time and again for the amazing amount of free content developer Criterion has continued to release long after the game hit shelves. But if you own the game, you already know that the free content comes in the form of automatic updates, not PlayStation store DLC. So technically, it doesn't count as a PSN freebie. But the game has offered so much value, we're mentioning it anyway.

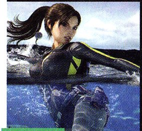


Golden Axe

Soulcalibur



Soulcalibur



Tomb Raider

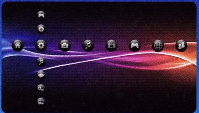
For your fingers

You could pay $1.99 for a premium bikini girl theme, or you could throw together a haphazard collection of game girl titillations for the unbeatable price of *free.* Follow our handy guide and you'll enjoy coyly panning cameras and provocative still shots of virtual women. After you're done perusing, please go sit in a corner (*away* from humans and sharp objects), and rethink your life. [Yes, Roger, we're talking to you.]

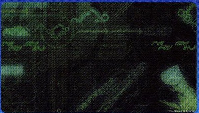
Golden Axe: Beast Rider trailers
Bayonetta trailer
Soulcalibur IV wallpapers (grab 5, 7, and 8, and avoid 6 at all costs)
Tomb Raider: Underworld (two themes and a wallpaper)

more ➔

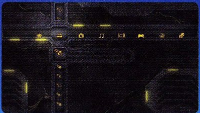
The Best *Unofficial* Ways to Dress Up your PS3



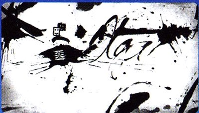
Sfere Black 3, by Javier Ocasio. Get it at: http://www.studiotwentyeight.com/portfolio.htm



Trend Whore wallpaper, by Robert Pennycook. Get it at: http://ionshower.deviantart.com/art/Trend-Whore-79544227



Resistance Chimera PS3 Theme, by Draicus (a.k.a. James). Get it at: http://draicus.deviantart.com/art/Resistance-Chimera-PS3-Theme-77467877

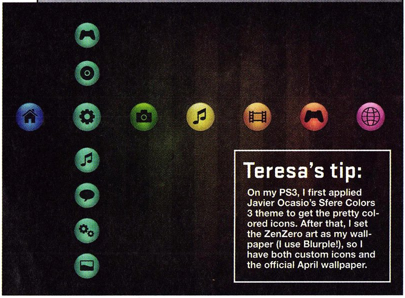


INKmess PS3 theme, by Oscar Javier Juarez Diaz. Get it at: http://darkaoz.deviantart.com/art/DarKaoZ-INKmess-PS3-Theme-69496749

Doing it yourself

You've dressed *your* PS3, now dress PTOM's

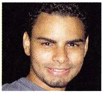
Calling all creative folks: make us a PTOM theme or wallpaper! We contacted two of the artists we featured on the previous page to ask for their insight on how to get started. After you're done, email your painstaking creations to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com with the header "PTOM Dress-up" and we'll pick the best ones to display in a future issue. Plus, if we love your design enough, we'll use it as an *official* PTOM theme of the month and make it available for all our readers to download.



Teresa's tip:

On my PS3, I first applied Javier Ocasio's Sfere Colors 3 theme to get the pretty colored icons. After that, I set the ZenZero art as my wallpaper (I use Blurple!), so I have both custom icons and the official April wallpaper.

The round, colorful icons are the highlight of Javier Ocasio's Sfere Colors 3 theme, though we appreaciate the darkly-hued, colored stripes as well. Ocasio also has PSP themes and other PS3 wallpapers available for download on his website (www.studiotwentyeight.com).



Making a Theme

Javier Ocasio

Age: 26
Location: Bayamon, Puerto Rico
Occupation: Freelance Graphic Designer

THE BASICS: When I create the images and save them as .png I use the compiler on the Sony site (www.us.playstation.com/Content/PS3NetworkPlatform/Updates/img/ps3_themes/PS3_Custom_Theme_v101-E.zip). But Sony's documents on that link are old. The added icons from the newer firmware are not specified.

THERE ARE OTHER BUILDERS ON THE WEB that let people create themes, too. They're easier than Sony's compiler and updated with all the icons. PS3 Theme Creator is one of them (www.freewebs.com/ps3themecreator/).

SHAPING THE ICONS: I tried to make them similar to the default icons but not the same, so they are more unique. The Shape tool in Photoshop is good to create the basic shape of the icon, then you apply the effect you want to that icon.

ADDING SOUND EFFECTS: You'll need to convert your audio file to a .vag file and then add the code to your XML file. I think PS3 Theme Creator (link above) lets you add sounds, too, but I've never tried to add sounds to my themes (yet).

Making a Wallpaper

Robert Pennycook

Age: 32
Location: Belfast, Northern Ireland
Occupation: Transport Manager

THE BEST ADVICE I CAN GIVE: Always start hi-res and scale down if needed. Scaling up always reduces image quality!

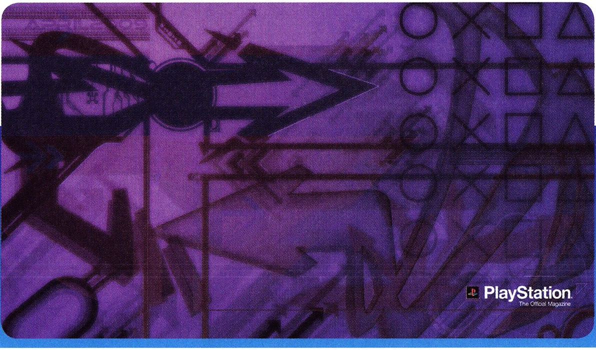
DON'T GET TOO TEMPTED to create a beautiful picture in that big open space. Remember the wallpaper is only part of the picture, and the XMB still has to fit around it! Take into account where the different icons go, explore the menu, and note what goes where. Use the area around the XMB for your high detail and eye-catching doodles!

QUICK HINT: Use the Adjustment Layer > Hue Saturation feature of PhotoShop to change the overall color/feel of the entire picture instantly. It is your friend!

INSPIRATION: For Trend Whore, I decided on the overall color before starting. Green is supposed to be relaxing, and after a few sessions of *CoD4* my eyes needed a relaxing break! I was aiming for a futuristic graffiti look. I start with a simple idea or general feel I am trying to achieve and then get creative from there. I try to get the basic layout down first—the biggest shapes and the overall color—and then work my way down to smaller details.

SOFTWARE: Illustrator to create custom brushes, which I then use within Photoshop. Takes a bit of time to set up, but saves a lot of time in the long run.

The first "Official" PTOM wallpaper



The kind and talented Robert Pennycook donated April's theme of the month—in seven different colors, at both 720p and 1080p! To download it yourself, go to www.mediafire.com/file/jny2dnq2gm3/PTOM-AprilTheme.rar (for the .rar file) or www.mediafire.com/file/yi0qdimmyyd/PTOM-AprilTheme.zip (for the .zip file). Save it to a flash drive, in a folder titled PHOTO, and transfer it to your PS3. Then open the file in the PHOTO tab, save the image as your wallpaper, and voilà, a custom PTOM theme, just for you.

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1 min
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7 mins

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FOR LESS.

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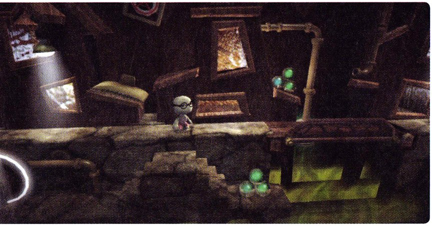
PART THREE IN AN ONGOING SERIES

LITTLEBIGPLANETEERS

PTOM's favorite original *LBP* levels brought to you by the Sackpeople that created them. Our pick this month:

The Scary Factory Overlooking the Small Village!



The Small Village may in fact be scarier than the Factory...but in a good way!

Before *LittleBigPlanet* officially launched last October, developer Media Molecule hosted an exclusive beta for a few lucky members of the public, and from that fortunate group they selected a handful of amateur level-designers to spotlight on their website. Among that group was Ole-Marius (AKA "geosautus"), the mastermind behind two of *LittleBigPlanet's* most popular user-created levels: the ingenious Mad Mansion and the stylish World of Colour [*sic*]. He recently finished a new level and gives us the inside scoop on what went into creating…The Scary Factory Overlooking the Small Village!

TIME SPENT MAKING THE LEVEL: It took me a week, which is about the time I usually spend on my levels.

INSPIRATION: The inspiration behind this level was primarily Tim Burton's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.* When I started planning this level, the idea was that the factory once produced rainbows but had since been abandoned. It was up to the player to restore power to the factory and transform it from dull and gray to really bright and colorful. Unfortunately, once I started building the level, I never really got that far. Instead, I based the factory around electricity and just played around with different gameplay concepts.

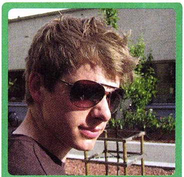
HARDEST PORTION TO DESIGN (OR ANY TECHNICAL HURDLES): The hardest part to design in this level was the part where you have to get through a set of randomly generated electric boxes. The problem I had here was that the machine would often create impossible scenarios that would just leave players frustrated. I spent a lot of time tweaking the machine until I was happy with the way it operated—I wanted it to be challenging, not impossible.

FAVORITE THING ABOUT THE LEVEL: I really like the beginning and the ending of my level. Interestingly, those are the two parts I planned before I started building them. Maybe I need to do more planning. I'll plan the next one. Or no, I won't.

ANY DETAILS WE MIGHT HAVE MISSED? When the red car leaves the factory, it opens up and releases some goodies. Also, near the end where you encounter the broken door that won't fully open, you can stand inside the door and jump to reveal additional goodies.

OTHER COMMENTS: Thanks to all who play and heart my levels!

OTHER PUBLISHED LEVELS BESIDES THE SCARY FACTORY: Garden 1.1, World of Colour (moderated), GoW – Demon Skull (moderated), Mad Mansion, Mystery Mine.



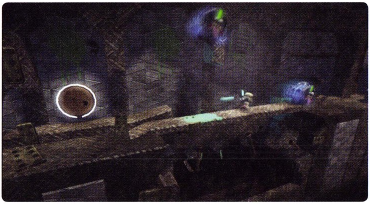
NAME: OLE-MARIUS
PSN ID: GEOSAUTUS
AGE: 21
LOCATION: NORWAY
OCCUPATION: STUDYING (AND FEEDING CAKE TO MY FAT PRINCESS)

Any desire to be a professional game designer?
Yes! Designing levels in *LBP* is great fun! Imagine being able to design games for a living... aahrgl!

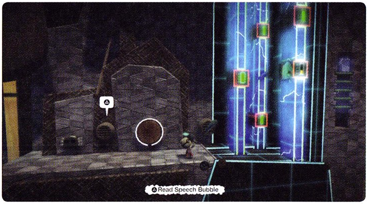
WORKING ON ANY NEW LEVELS? I want to do a more story driven level, but it's too early to reveal anything.

ADVICE TO NEW LEVEL DESIGNERS: I'll just give people the same advice I give my little brother: Present the problem to the player before you present the solution. Always try to reward the player with points, lights, movement, sounds etc. Small touches can really add to the overall feel of your level. Build the level that *you* want to play. Oh, and don't give up if your first level sucks. My first level was rubbish. World of Colour was actually my sixth level.

CAN YOU RECOMMEND OTHER LEVELS OR DESIGNERS FOR EVERYONE TO CHECK OUT? There are a lot of great levels out there now, but I would like to recommend the creator ShadowFlareX who has created a lot of cool concepts.



Electrified, jumping robot cows? Whatever they are, they're impressively smart!

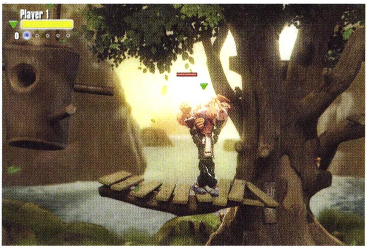


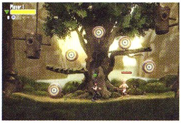
The level makes excellent use of the newly-added paintgun. Take that, circuits!

PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for less than the price of three Bruce Lee movie rentals.

PSN PREVIEWS





Player 1
02:53

Rag Doll Kung Fu

AVAILABLE: TBA DEVELOPER: Tarsier Studios

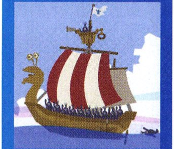
Playing *Rag Doll Kung Fu* is like watching drunken marionettes fight—the punches are too wide, the kicks are too sweeping, and the impact of each hit has too much bounce. As you can imagine, *controlling* the characters (especially if you're used to timing your attacks with absolute precision) can feel unintuitive at first, as it did during my hands-on test. The physics of the game is purposely ragdoll, meaning each time you punch you'll likely see a slightly different result.

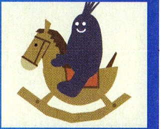
But let go of your control freak tendencies for a moment, and think about it again: drunken marionettes fighting. It's loose. It's comical. It's *energetic.* And that, I believe, is the point of *Rag Doll Kung Fu.* Some of the more powerful moves require you to use the Sixaxis' motion-sensing capabilities—meaning when your character does a ground slam, you're actually slamming your controller, too, mimicking the same motion with your hands. Precise? Perhaps not. But fun? Most likely.

I also tested out some of the single-player challenges, which include grabbing fish and tossing them into a basket, battling as many opponents as possible within a time limit, and shooting targets with *shuriken.* Doing well unlocks clothing and new character models (for your custom characters). Unfortunately, the only online support currently planned is leaderboards, though up to four can brawl on the same PS3. There will allegedly be Trophies, too. But it's still a toss-up as to whether this stylish fighting game will evoke child-like wonder or frustration-fueled childish tantrums. Teresa Dun

PLAYSTATION STORE

Downloadable content is hard to pin down. Dates change. Content shifts last minute. But here is one collection we know will be good—because it's free.





▶LOCOROCO 2'S FREEBIE BONANZA

It begins with several free PSP wallpapers, but in the weeks approaching (and following) *LocoRoco 2's* release, keep checking the PlayStation Store for more free *LocoRoco 2* goodies!

x4
LVL 8-3
3545
MENU
+1150
DOUBLE GAP BONUS
CHAIN BONUS x7

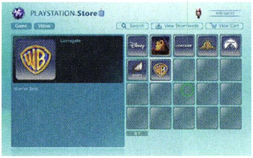
SUCKER THEM IN

We hope you like to share, because Sony Online Entertainment and PopCap Games have partnered up, and they're offering updated versions of already beloved casual games for your PS3 over the next several months...including titles like *Bejeweled 2, Zuma, Heavy Weapon, Peggle,* and *Feeding Frenzy.* What does this influx of casual games mean for you? Well, easy Trophies, hi-def graphics, Dolby 5.1 surround sound, and perhaps a few new modes, but more importantly...it means your wife/sister/[insert other non-traditional gamer cliché here] will be hogging your PS3, stealing precious minutes from your *Killzone 2* or *Call of Duty* time. But hey, that's the cost of introducing the joys of gaming to the uninitiated in your life. We say it's worth it. Just, uh, be sure to give them a time limit.

Letters

Feedback, Insight, Solid Gaming, and *"Oooh, Canada...!"*

I was wondering why the PlayStation Network doesn't team up with Blockbuster since they also have a mail rental system. Netflix vs. Blockbuster just like Xbox vs. PlayStation! >>

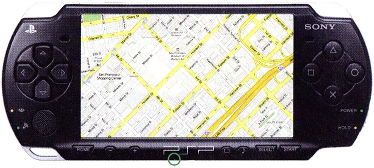


BATTLE OF THE BRANDS

I have some ideas, and I want to know if Sony is thinking about them also. For one, I know Xbox just came out with Netflix on Live, which I feel is a good idea, and I was wondering why the PlayStation Network doesn't team up with Blockbuster since they also have a mail rental system. Netflix vs. Blockbuster just like Xbox vs. PlayStation!

Mkriska28, via email

Sure, Sony *could* team up with another company like Blockbuster, but really, they don't need to! PSN's Video Download Service provides a wealth of TV and movie-viewing options. We'll tell you more about it in next month's issue.



DESTINATION: IRONY

I'm glad that after reading February's issue, I'm not the only one who's been waiting for a U.S. version of GPS for the PSP. And the camera, too. Seriously, where are they? I'd really like the GPS for when I'm driving my car to school (a 1997 Tercel doesn't have one built-in!) I'm hoping that they will be cheaper than other GPSs in retail stores, such as Garmin. Any idea as to what's the hold up?

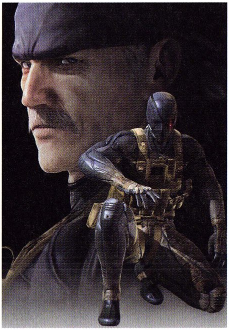
Ashley Calvo, Miami FL

To be completely honest, Ashley, we're as lost as you are. The GPS idea has completely fallen off the radar after its release in Japan. Despite being shown over a year ago at CES, now the word is that there is no word! We're teased by SCEA with "exciting new developments" for PSP in 2009, but it isn't clear if the GPS add-on is one of them.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

"My brother and I decided to stop playing *MGS4* and play through the others first. What followed was the most amazing month in my life."

THE BROTHERS SNAKE



When I started playing *Metal Gear Solid 4,* I was immediately stunned by the graphics, sound, gameplay, and atmosphere. It was like nothing I'd ever played, but something didn't feel right. Since I hadn't played the other *Metal Gears,* I didn't know who Snake really was, and the story was getting more and more complex as I played. This was stopping me from fully enjoying the game. So I decided the best way to solve this problem was to play the previous titles.

I did some research and found out that Wal-Mart was selling *Metal Gear Solid: The Essential Collection [Metal Gear Solid 1,2,* and *3]* for $30, so my brother and I decided to stop playing *MGS4* and play through the others first. What followed was the most amazing month in my life (videogame-wise). My brother played *MGS* as I watched. I played *MGS2* as he watched. He played *MGS3* as I watched, and finally I played through *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of The Patriots.* It was EPIC!

I never knew videogames could stir up so many emotions, make you think about your existence in the world, or that a videogame could compete with other forms of storytelling, pointing out the pros of pacifism, the dangers of nuclear weapons, the futility of war, etc. I could go on and on about what I learned and experienced by playing the *MGS* series. Now when people ask me "what is your favorite videogame of all time?" I tell them *Metal Gear Solid 4.*

Jose Garcia, via email

Now that is an excellent story, Jose. Playing all four *Metal Gear* games back to back is pretty much the definition of epic, and we're glad to hear that you and your brother could bond over it. It's a shame that the general public never gets to see this side of gaming. So, the rest of you, got any amazing stories of your adventures into the social aspect of gaming? Share your tales with us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com!

The not-so solid Snake.

A COMPELLING ARGUMENT

I know that you said to be specific when you asked us to share our game control issues, but my situation is very unique. I only have one arm. In the days of the NES, I managed by using my ring finger for the pad, and middle/pointer fingers for the buttons. Easy. Then there were more buttons. Then there were triggers. Then there were analog sticks...it gets more complicated, but I adapt.

Currently, I use my thumb for the Left stick, and turn my hand to the right and use my pinky for left triggers and middle/pointer for Right-trigger/face buttons. I generally stick to games that don't rely on the left triggers; if the Right-analog is necessary during action sequences, I'm done for good there. But 90-percent of all games could be made 10 times more enjoyable for me—or even possible for me to play—if developers would simply make all the action buttons 100-percent customizable. Some games give you pre-set layouts but still rely too much on triggers for me to play well, so I'm out in the cold. Even RPGs, my favorite and easiest to play genre, are getting more and more action-oriented. Just make the controls fully customizable, like on the PC, and you'd have at least one happier gamer.

Ryan, via email

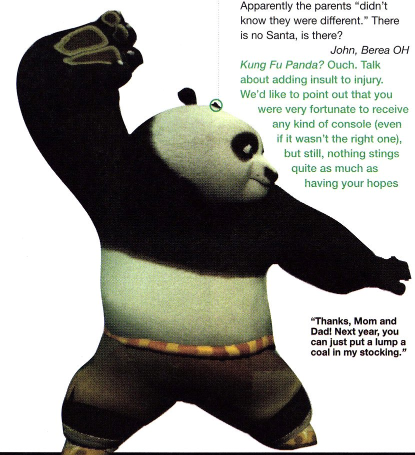
Well, there's not much we can add to that. Come on developers, no excuses; the fact that controls are not fully customizable is ludicrous, and should be standard on all games.

EVEN SANTA MAKES MISTAKES

I spent all year dropping hints to the parental units for a PS3 for Christmas. I figured that in November when my PS2 finally burned up (the last of the four I have had) that they would see my suffering and get the hint. So I made my plea: *The Dark Knight* on Blu-ray and a PS3. Lo and behold, Christmas morning comes and my first gift…*Dark Knight*. Cha-ching! Down one. After some much needed clothes, I see the last gift hidden behind the tree… holy crime fighters, soon it would be me and the Dark Knight with a PS3. So I ripped open the wrapping, and I was shocked to find only *Kung Fu Panda, Lego Indiana Jones,* and an Xbox 360. Apparently the parents "didn't know they were different." There is no Santa, is there?

John, Berea OH

Kung Fu Panda? Ouch. Talk about adding insult to injury. We'd like to point out that you were very fortunate to receive any kind of console (even if it wasn't the right one), but still, nothing stings quite as much as having your hopes brutally dashed on Christmas morning. How did the rest of you fare this past holiday season? Sure, that was months ago now, but we'd still like to know. Send your holiday horror stories to PTOM_letters@futureus.com with the subject line "Holiday Story."



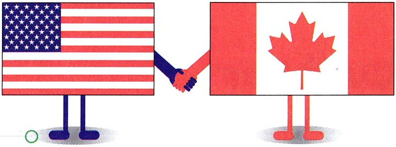
"Thanks, Mom and Dad! Next year, you can just put a lump a coal in my stocking."

OH CANADA!

I would like to begin by stating that I am a proud Canadian and, more importantly, a HUGE Sony fan! I really enjoy reading your magazines, but I've noticed in the letters segment you always put a "Canadian e-mail we won't be running" section. I would like to know what you have against Canadians, considering that our societies are almost identical and that technically, we are just as much part of North America as the United States. And we love PlayStation just as much!

Constantine, Canada

Alright, let's clear the air once and for all: we have nothing against Canadians! We kid because we love! Don't take it so personally, Canada…and stop sending us emails about it.



"Okay, okay...we forgive you for Nickelback."

WHAT HAVE WE DONE

I wanted to say thank you for not printing full Canadian emails. We do NOT care what they think. By censoring them, you are doing the world a great service. Thank you again and keep up the good work.

Jason, via email

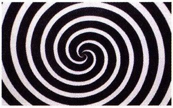
Stop that! We just got through saying we like Canada!

AYE FOR AN EYE

My wife just got me the PS Eye for Christmas. Now I see there are not a lot of uses for it yet, and I am hoping that will change in the near future. However, I do have

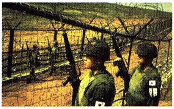
END ZONE

We were feeling pretty "in the zone" when we wrote up the Reviews Intro page of our February issue, and reader Wes Eramo of San Jose was sharp enough to catch on. He correctly identified all three images and will receive the spectacular prize of some random crap off Rob's desk for his efforts. Well done, Wes!



TWILIGHT ZONE
"This 'swirl' appeared in the beginning credits of the TV show *The Twilight Zone.*"

FROZONE
"This character was Mr. Incredible's buddy that took him out at night to secretly fight crime."



DEMILITARIZED ZONE (KOREA)
"This type of zone is an area, usually the frontier or boundary between two or more countries, where military activity is not permitted."

twitter

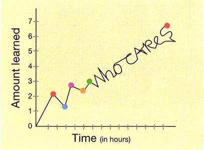
A SERIES OF TUBES

For all of those who asked (and trust us, there were a lot of you), we still do not have an official website. Sad, but true. But while we work on getting one up and running, you can find us at twitter.com/P_TOM or join our Facebook group (just search for *PlayStation: The Official Magazine* and look for our most recent cover). We're on both all day, every day, so why not come say hi?

1

Number of people who were upset that PTOM didn't review *Disney Sing It* [Roger].

LEARNING CURVE



a request for the next software update. Can we please have the ability to run a video chat during gameplay within a movable video window? This should be enabled for all PlayStation games through the PS3 software, not just by the game makers. It would be totally cool if while playing *My Buzz Quiz TV* with friends we could see and talk to each other. Or even when I am playing some *World at War* with my buddies if we could have a private window to talk without having to exit the game to start a chat. The way the system is set up currently is not user friendly enough. WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY.

William, via email

Actually, William, we don't have the technology. Dedicated chat through the XMB is one of a handful of as-yet unfulfilled requests that's been around since, well, the launch of the PS3. Most people seem to be asking for voice chat rather than video chat, but either way, it's not available yet. So go ahead and keep on hoping, but don't expect to be making faces at your friends via your PS3 any time soon.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

So I once again read a review where a reviewer comments on the "steep learning curve" and how hard and difficult the game was to learn. Do me a favor. Make the graph. Let Y equal amount learned increasing from bottom to top, and X equal time with time increasing from left to right. This is how actual "learning curve" graphs look. Make a steep and a shallow "learning curve," both topping out at the same level. Think about it.

Robert Gamble, via email

Alright, Robert, we're feeling generous today so we'll grant this favor, but you totally owe us one now, man.

APPLE OF HIS EYE

iPlay. You play. We all play!

Your magazine is by far the most awesome-est, coolest, gansta-est magazine out there. You answer questions amazingly. Now I have a question for you. Check it out: PlayStations 1, 2, and 3 are the best systems ever. Graphics, games, hardware, Blu-ray…but do you think if Apple made a game system it would overpower *every* gaming system out there? Also, do you think the system would have the greatest graphics, interface, design, and advertisements? It would be nice if you put this in the magazine so it would sort of be a shout out to Apple to say, "Hey biznatches, we're waiting!"

Chasmes, via email

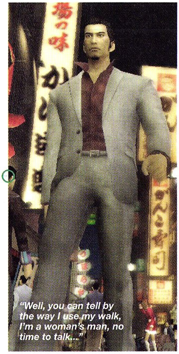
Maybe it would be better if Apple just kept its hands to itself, don't you think? Besides, if they *did* make a console, the controller would have, what, like one button and a touch wheel? As Kratos said to the polo shirt: thanks, but no thanks.

PERSONA-L INSULT

First of all, I love your magazine. And usually, you guys are right about lots of stuff. But what were you thinking when you gave Yakuza 2 PS2 game of 2008!? *Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4* got 4.5 stars from you and *Yakuza 2* got 4 stars but *Yakuza* wins? Did you forget how to count? Say you're sorry and promise to work on your math.

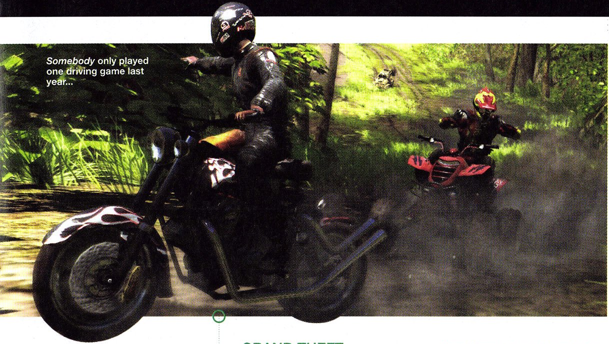
Ron Stickler, Austin TX

Well Ron, while you're correct about the scores that *Yakuza* and *Persona* received, the Game of the Year awards isn't a strictly by-the-numbers affair. It's about the games that we had the most fun playing and had the most staying power with us. While *Persona 4* is a great JRPG, it's *Yakuza's* enticing blend of beat-'em-up action, diverse mini-games, and compelling storyline that makes it the PS2 game we'll remember from 2008. Besides, one PTOM staffer (guess who) insists that while mackin' on *Persona's* Japanese school girls is fun, it just doesn't compare to sealin' the deal with a hostess in *Yakuza*. Bring on *Yakuza 3!*



"Well, you can tell by the way I use my walk, I'm a woman's man, no time to talk..."

contact Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. Because we don't have the Canadians to kick around anymore.



Somebody only played one driving game last year...

OUR NAME IS MUD

The best driving game of the year was majorly flawed in your February issue. The best driving game of the year for PS3 was hands down *MotorStorm: Pacific Rift!* It had incredible detail on environments and cars. The soundtrack rocked and the difficulty was excellent. The game set the bar very high for off-road racers this year.

Jared, via email

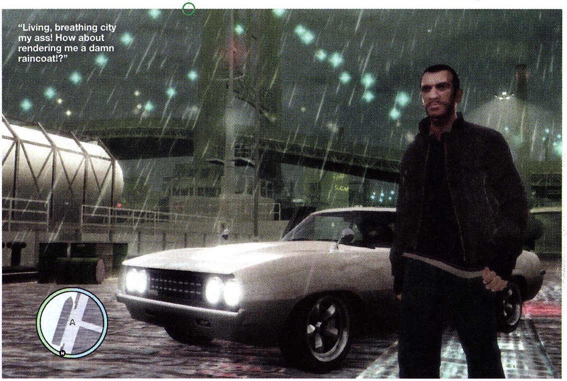
Dear Jared,
You're wrong.
Sincerely, PTOM

GRAND THEFT AWARD SHOW

Well, it's official: I've lost all respect for your magazine. Your Game of the Year feature was such total BS, mostly because *GTA IV* got totally screwed! One runner-up mention? That's it!? Are you [salty language] serious!!? That should have been the game of the [seriously, watch your mouth] year! When have you ever seen a game do what *GTA IV* did? The world was so real and it's [come on, what would your mother say?] *Grand Theft Auto* for crying out loud! Come on!!

Germaine, via email

Jeez, Germaine, you're going to put someone's eye out with all those exclamation marks! And while we read your outrage loud and clear, we have to disagree. Yes, *GTA IV* was a spectacular accomplishment in many ways—most notably for its living, breathing city—we recognized *MGS4* as a staggering achievement. We don't want to pick nits, but while *GTA IV* absolutely deserved its runner-up position (and our Editors' Choice award) it just came up against one of the most incredible gaming productions ever. In our sorta humble opinion.



"Living, breathing city my ass! How about rendering me a damn raincoat!?"

STUFF AND THINGS

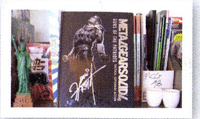
"I've always wondered what the PTOM office look like. Is it like some totally magical gaming fantasyland? I mean, it pretty much has to be covered in games and toys and stuff, right?"

Ray Ng, via email

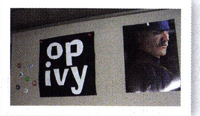
Well, Ray, our office itself isn't particularly exciting, but we do indeed have a pretty awesome collection of "stuff." We asked everyone to show us their favorite desk-dwelling item, and here's what we came up with:

TERESA: *Fallout* meets *Final Fantasy.* I think they've started mating.

ROGER: Plush fight!: Ultraman vs. *Dig Dug* dino. And my Fast.



ROB: Kojima-autographed *MGS4* book. It's great to be king...er, EIC.



SCOTT: My tribute wall: Ska punk forever! And I ♥ Snake.

KEN: My daughter made this solar print, just like Man Ray.

QUOTABLES APR 09

what you learned this issue

In the unlikely event that anyone ever asks you, "Is that a snake in your pocket?" You'll now be able to legitimately answer, "Yes, and it's Solid." p. 6

When we finally got it right, I actually recoiled as the paint hit the gun, saying "UGH!" out loud. It looked almost too realistic when the RED SPATTER first hit the white sides. I guess that's how you know you've really got it right. p. 7

Don't think it's some elitist attitude of the enthusiast press, it's a general malaise shared by the gaming public: if PTOM ever ran a sports game on our cover, it'd be our worst selling issue of the year—guaranteed. p. 9

"There weren't high hopes for the long-delayed *Max Payne* movie, but even those were squashed by the reality of this travesty." p. 19

OUCH!

Here's another party offering to consider later in the year: pummeling your friends into bloody pulps… p. 22

DISARMED *And then, I watch in stupefied silence as he picks up his old arm from the ground, grips it between his two (attached) hands, and swings it around like a bat...literally beating them off with the soggy end.* p. 27

While I can appreciate the "Live Green!" messaging, the inconvenient truth is that *FUEL*'s worldview looks pretty good to me as it finally rids the roads of fast-lane–clogging Prius drivers. p. 30

The lone gun that's been announced has no bullets. It's only for bluffing. p. 32

"Now people are gaming for social gratification, not just puzzle solving and figuring out props." **VIN DIESEL**

Undocumented fusion-based technology, causality-violating applied science, detrimental effects to organic life and inanimate objects alike, and the sort of legendary, lasting, Safety-Is-Job-One quality you can only really find amid the rusting, jerry-rigged and/or occasionally radioactive tangles of disused, Cold War-era, Soviet apparatuses. What could possibly go wrong? p. 64

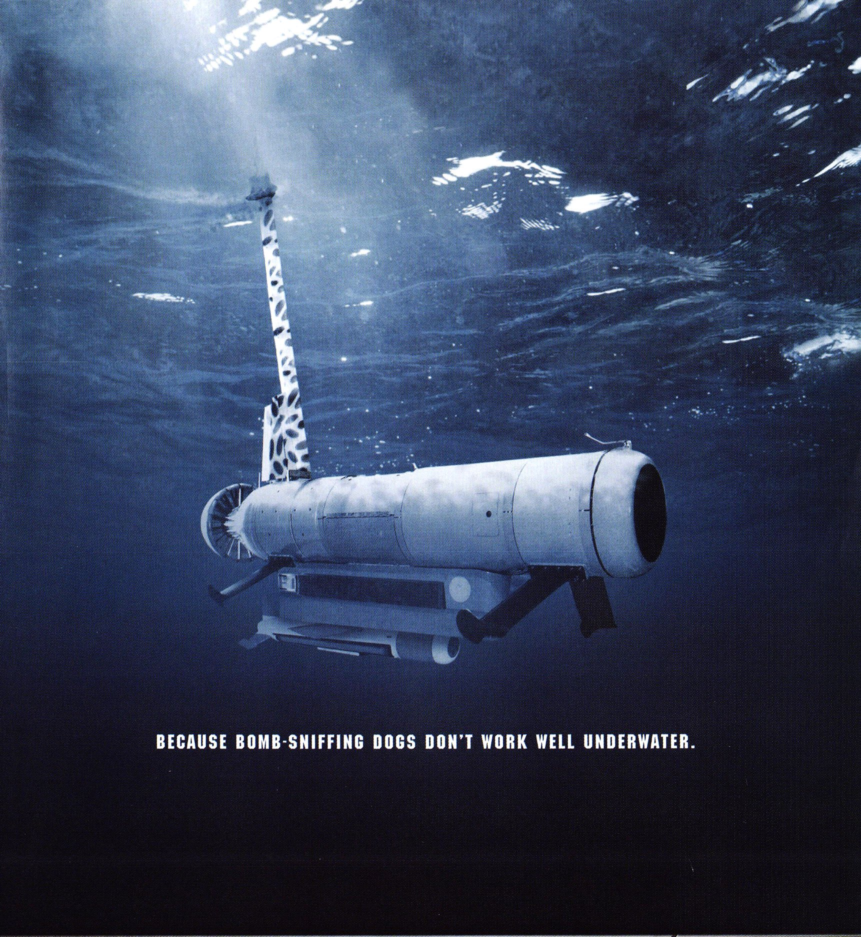
It would only be worth $10 if it came with a $10 rebate. p. 72

How's this for a game template: Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*—the first part of his epic *Divine Comedy*—recreated as a *God of War*-style brawler by the team that brought you the superbly scary *Dead Space*. p. 38

Hmm...

Katamari creator Keita Takahashi takes a bold step with ***Noby Noby Boy:*** he doesn't just make the gameplay obtuse…he removes it altogether. p. 74

It's a sad day for gaming when a GIRL IN A SKIMPY THONG can't keep my attention. p. 82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